



IRENE DWEN ANDREWS

W. P.
D. X



Walter Harris Pollock
With Epton Collis's
Memb. '92

“LA BELLA”

AND OTHERS

BY THE SAME WRITER.

SCHOOLS AND MASTERS OF FENCE
FROM THE MIDDLE AGES TO THE
NINETEENTH CENTURY.

Illustrated. GEORGE BELL & SONS. Reprinted
for Bohn's Artist's Library.

CONSEQUENCES.

A Novel.

RICHARD BENTLEY & SONS.

“LA BELLA”

And others

Being Certain Stories Recollected by

EGERTON CASTLE

CASSELL & COMPANY, LIMITED

LONDON, PARIS & MELBOURNE

1892

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Two of these stories appear for the first time in printer's ink. Others have seen the light at different periods, in annuals and magazines; and the author's thanks are due, and here expressed, to the editors of *Cornhill* and of *Temple Bar* for their courteous permission to reprint the same.

TO WALTER HERRIES POLLOCK.

AT a time when it was the strange fashion for publishers of books to warn the makers thereof that the "short-story volume" never could find real favour with English readers, you, my dear Walter, with critical authority, always extolled the peculiar virtue of small frames for word-pictures.

For such reason alone it were fit that this, my first collection of short tales, should be inscribed to you. But there is another.

In my younger days of literary bashfulness, you were the first expert to give me that word of quiet approval which was "sufficient and necessary" to keep me going on a new and pleasing pursuit.

That I should have followed up a fresh vein of enjoyment—the very subtle one of giving finite (dare I say shapely?) form to scenes and scenery that would otherwise have remained and faded in the misty demesne of memory or firelight musings—I owe really to your constant kindness of word and deed.

In this little museum of bygone fancies, now recollected as an afterthought, you will no doubt recognise several as having struck a sympathetic chord in you; you may perhaps also recall the various moods in which they were set forth, for our now mature friendship dates almost from the first day when I be-thought myself to forward a manuscript to a printer.

Some, it has occurred to me, may complain of hearing a too frequent *cliquetis d'armes* through these pages; but this, I should say, will be no fault in your ears. You know, as I do, that the sword is as great a builder, as a solver, of difficult situations, and how endless are the stirring tales that might have their opening or closing scenes on fencing ground.

In the portraying of Steven Munro's duchess, exists, if not apparent (for we would fain believe that Brander Matthews' criterion of successful collaboration will apply here), the qualifying touch of a pen you know also. To borrow Robert Louis Stevenson's quaintly ingenious expression, it is that of my little "critic on the hearth." And if you read of Master Huldebrand's dream, you will taste of a quaint, pathetic fancy, fixed, by the same hand, in the old-world atmosphere, amid the rococo surroundings of a little drowsy German "Residenz," and you will then, I imagine, readily understand why I did not resist the temptation to bring with it my volume to a graceful close.

E. C.

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Clank of Steel.

“LA BELLA.”

AN INCIDENT OF THE FENCING FLOOR.

I.

I HAVE always looked upon the teaching of the noble science of fence as a profession which the most fastidious might, under stress of necessity, take up without fear of “derogating”; precedent, indeed—were such justification required—would not be found lacking; names of high standing shine in goodly constellations through its venerable annals. The Pallavicini of Palermo; those magnificent Castilians, Narvaez and Mendoza; Saint Didier, the royally-favoured gentleman Provençal; Saint Ange, admired of the Versailles Court;—all men of undoubted blood—thought it no disgrace to turn their skill at the use of the loyal steel to profitable account. The Chevalier de Fréville on the Neva, the diplomatically enigmatical d’Eon in his Soho rooms, strove openly, in later days, to swell a flat purse and maintain an ancient name, by imparting to others their special knowledge of the gentle subtleties of *carte* and *tierce*. Our own great apostle of more sturdy swordsmanship, Sir W. Hope of Balcomie, might well, one would think, have welcomed such a reverse of fortune as, half a century after his time, caused that acknowledged model of gentlemanly refinement, Malevolti Tremamondo, to take rank as the peerless master of fence known to the world by the name of “Angelo.”

Ever of a habit of mind that clings to old

traditions, it was with something of pleasurable excitement that—now, alas! more years ago than I quite care to specify—I discovered in a certain Tuscan city, which had already delighted me by the placid, old-world atmosphere it had preserved in the middle of this flurried century, a modern instance of the blue-blooded "Maestro."

A journey to Italy was in those days considered indispensable to an artist's education. Homeward bound, after the conventional year, in glorious autumn weather, I was caught and retained by the charm of the ancient town in question, and being young then (as I have hinted), impressionable, and my own master, resolved forthwith to fix there my *penates* for the coming winter.

Delicious, sunny, lazy place it was—no doubt is still, but I have never seen it since—sitting contentedly on the banks of a yellow river which, at sunset, ran with purple and gold; encompassed by crumbling ramparts of fascinating obsolete trace, with bastions heart-shaped between their retired flanks, and an occasional overhanging "pepper-box" turret; full of sombre winding streets, as well as of sunlit quays and piazzas; and possessing (for the initiated), within elm and vine-planted courtyards, wine-cellars, lofty, pillared, and cross-lighted—a species of background especially suited to the "Cavalier" genre I then affected—where a well-favoured maid, in picturesque multi-coloured attire, could give artistic flavour to the meagre wine she poured from some huge-bellied, straw-covered *fiaschone*.

I secured before long, through the help of a travelling acquaintance, an old artist, by name

Calarone, a set of rooms—studio and bedchamber—ideal from my point of view—at the top of a once magnificent, now weirdly dilapidated, palace in the heart of the town. And as fencing was one of my crazes, there only needed the discovery that my landlords devoted themselves to leading the Tuscan youth through the mysteries of the white weapon in the very room beneath that where I proposed to woo the muse of limners (if there be not such an one, there should!) to complete my satisfaction in my new quarters. Thus I came to be the tenant and pupil in arms of Ettore and Carlo dei Lugani, counts of a most ancient patent, with a prodigious pedigree said to be quite unimpeachable—but apparently without any other worldly inheritance than the decrepit Palazzo in question—and now renowned masters of fence in the same old historic city that had known the splendours of their predecessors.

From the very first I felt a special interest in the goodly pair, and the character of their life struck me as being at once the oddest, quaintest, and withal the most touching, I have ever known.

The morning after my installation, as I ran down the vast, echoing stairs from my lofty perch under the eaves of the wide roof, I halted one moment at the open door of the fencing-room to seek a glimpse of the young man whose acquaintance I had made the previous afternoon over a foil bout, and whose handsome, melancholy countenance, in curious contrast with a most unaffected and attractive cheerfulness of manner, had haunted me through the watches of the night.

A monotonous sweeping sound which had been

noticeable ceased as I looked in. There was my noble professor of yesterday, no longer attired in neat, close-fitting white canvas, and picturesque black belt and gauntlets, no longer grasping with practised grace the pliant foil, but, aproned and bare-armed (what a muscular arm it was!), wielding with equal mastery and blitheness a very business-like broom.

I was about to retire, fearful of having committed an indiscretion, when he hailed me in his gay voice :

"Good-day, my dear scholar. A lovely morning! On your way to breakfast, I suppose? I recommend Café Pisano. *We* have had our morning crust, and been busy these three hours"—by a slight glance over his shoulder indicating a heap of freshly mended and furbished fencing implements, which testified indeed to recent work with hammer, file, and sand-cloth.

Infected by his simple friendliness, I was about to respond with cordiality, when the sound of footsteps from the inner room attracted my attention. I looked round to see, with something of a start, what appeared to be the very double of the man before me, but clad, with almost foppish nicety, in all the ceremony of the Italian fashion of those days—black coat, light trousers and gloves, highly polished boots; all of a curiously exact fit. The sweeper, following the direction of my eyes, exclaimed with a flashing smile :

"'Tis thou, Frattuccio!"—and his accent was as tender as a caress. Then, with a Grandisonian wave of the arm free of the broom :

"May I be allowed," he said turning to me, "to introduce Count Ettore Lugani—my elder brother?—Frattuccio, this is the English gentleman, our new pupil and lodger."

Bowing gravely over the silk hat, to the shiny perfection of which he was slowly giving a final gloss, the new-comer turned upon me a pair of eyes as luminous and beautiful as his brother's, and as full of unconscious melancholy.

"I am looking forward," he said, with the pretty, old-fashioned courtesy that had captivated my fastidious fancy in the younger, "to the pleasure, which it seems was my brother's yesterday, of some converse with you over foils and sabres. Shall it be this evening?"

He bowed again, exchanged another look of comfortable affection with his brother, and with springy step sallied forth to his daily work.

Charmed by their original type, that of the Cisalpine Gaul, striking in its refined, blonde, grey-eyed beauty amid the swarthy Etruscan faces around, I lost no time in transmitting to canvas several sketches of my landlords' heads. This, and nearer acquaintance, showed me more difference between them than I had at first conceived. They were not, after all, more like than many a brother-pair, and I soon ceased to take Ettore's paler, sharper, bolder features, for Carlo's dreamy and still almost boyishly smooth face. But, from a distance, it was impossible to tell one from the other: their slender figures, the graceful vigour of which gave such complete satisfaction to my artist's senses, were cast in the selfsame mould; as to height and breadth they tallied to a fraction. And thereby hangs a detail.

Once fairly established as a denizen of the town, I naturally came to frequent the same little social nucleus, and haunt the same meeting-places as my hosts. I often met one or the other of the young

Luganis out of doors, bent on a professional or friendly visit, or strolling, cigarette in mouth, down the Corso of an evening; or yet, under pretext of some very modest refreshment, putting in an appearance at the Military Café, where his reception by the pelisséd officers of the Dragoons or Bersaglieri was as a rule equivalent to a small ovation.

Nevertheless, though scarce a day would pass but I saw either Carlo or Ettore about the town, it gradually dawned upon me that they were never seen together, save in their own house.

By-and-by this peculiarity, which seemed accepted by all their friends—among whom the brothers seemed to be strictly interchangeable—began to puzzle me considerably, as strange in the face of the perfect harmony subsisting between them. One day, up in my studio, I tentatively ventured a comment upon it to the veteran Calarone.

The latter stared at me: then his white beard began to wag with his jovial subterranean laugh.

"Do you really not know the reason? Why, 'tis as the secret of the comedy here. It stands thus, my young friend—I may as well tell you, lest you put them to the blush by some blundering question. But one set of those exquisite clothes, which you have no doubt admired upon their athletic backs, but one tall hat, one fur-lined cloak, nay, for aught I can say, one pair of superfine boots, can all the vigour of their good right arms raise throughout a long year of assaults and lessons. Lucky for the boys they are of a size! And so the Luganis contrive to keep up that appearance they consider requisite, by a little mutual accommodation. Do you feel inclined to drop your

friends now that you know that they have only one coat between them? Your English notions of respectability——?”

“I”—I broke in, stammering in my eagerness, “I would but that I had it in my power to show what I think—I, who have more money than I know how to spend——”

“Only do not offer them any of this superfluous gold,” rejoined the old man drily. “The sole way to reach these proud boys is to take their lessons. They owe no man a farthing, and will be beholden to none—though at times, I have no doubt of it, they have to go through the day’s work upon little better than a crust of bread.”

And, as I exclaimed in horror, the old artist, withdrawing his dreamy gaze from the distant vista of Apennine crags—misty blue, with crests of living gold, of which my studio boasted a glorious prospect—looked quickly at me.

“Do you esteem them so worthy of pity?” he said. “They would not thank you for the thought. They are accustomed to be honoured for their bravely borne poverty, their hard-won independence—not condoled with. It is wonderful, though,” he continued musingly, “what a taste for sword-play seems to have arisen in this old town of ours since that rascally lawsuit—’tis five years gone now—which robbed them of their farms and fields and vineyards. They lay yonder,” pointing to the eastern hills, the snowy peaks of which were already hanging out crimson signals to the early sunset. “I myself am fain to submit at times to the tortures to which they put my dry old sinews and rusty hinges.”

It may readily be imagined that my enthusiasm for the patrician bread-winners showed no sign of decline after these revelations. I sought by every means to improve our friendship, and presently it came to be an established thing that twice or three times a month a merry little party should meet in my studio, after hours, when not only had I the pleasure of the Luganis' presence, but likewise the hidden satisfaction of watching their guileless enjoyment of my carefully prepared suppers, and hearing their innocent comments thereon.

"Per Bacco!—you Englishmen know how to feed. We should soon grow too fat for work at this rate, eh, Frattuccio?"

And it would sting me with a keener pang than might a token of deeper troubles, to notice how, on the days which followed these invigorating little feasts, the brothers surpassed themselves on their fencing-floor, their dash and nimbleness drawing unwonted cries of admiration from the most critical onlookers.

"Oho! Count Ettore is positively tremendous to-day—what a grip—what a wrist! Saw you that lightning cut? Friend Carlo, thou hast surely made a compact with the devil—thou art superhuman—Hep-la! Bravo!"

Or again, knowing their pitiful yet almost ludicrous reasons, to overhear between them such debates as this:

"Carino, I wish to go out at noon; will this suit thee?"

"Canst thou not stop in to-day? I, myself, had thought of going to make a call."

And I marvelled at the sweetness with which they

would yield one to the other and further each other's desires; the unaffected enjoyment they would take in any small pleasure that came in their path; the unvarying serenity of their content through the penury and laboriousness of their daily lives; marvelled to see how they would quaff with fullest zest of my choice flagons, yet could rise smiling from their own water-washed meal; how, of an evening, they would troll a merry song and strum a cavatina on my piano with hands of white refinement which the morning's menial work never seemed to harden or discolour.

It was towards the middle of the winter that, having these two youths so constantly in my thoughts and before my eyes, I not unnaturally came to nurse the idea of embodying them in the great work which, with the usual sanguine hope of the budding artist, I intended should become the foundation of my renown.

I soon decided to perpetuate them in one of those attitudes, typical of cultured vigour, wherein their wiry frames had so often delighted my eyes in the school.

I have said I affected “cavalier” subjects. The masters, in suitable attire—Ettore with a peaked beard for the sake of disguise and differentiation—were to be shown engaged in furious combat beneath a window, wherefrom still dangled a tell-tale silk ladder; while, leaning over a balcony, in excess of anguish and with hair dishevelled, I intended to portray, in wondrous beauty, the inevitable *she* of the situation, her face illumined by the cold light of dawn.

The Luganis good-humouredly fell in with my plans, and I had already sketched a satisfactory

arrangement of limbs and blades upon my canvas before I could find a feminine model at all approaching my glowing ideal for the third figure. But one evening, at a certain rich merchant's house where the young aristocrats—all fencing masters though they were—would not have condescended to appear, I marked a face and form, the opulent beauty of which not only came up to, but actually eclipsed the ambition of the protean images floating in my mind. I lost no time in having myself introduced to their owner, my facile, amorous fancy ensnared at first sight, and my artistic enthusiasm fairly aflame.

She was a young widow who, after promptly burying a rich old husband, and but just emerged from the tediousness of the necessary mourning, was newly settled in the town, and, as rumour satirically whispered, nothing loth to look about her for a handsome young one. She was quite determined, at any rate, to make the most of her youth and emancipation. I could not have fallen more fortunately for my suddenly conceived plans.

It does not belong to my story to narrate the progress of my intimacy with the Signora Catalani. Suffice it to say, that my warm advances were received with gracious placidity by the lady, and, on the occasion of my fourth visit, an audacious request that she should come and sit for the terrified female in my picture was acceded to with actual alacrity. This confidence in my discretion, which I may casually remark seemed to be shared by our mutual friends, was due, no doubt, to the curious notion prevalent in foreign, especially in southern countries, that "there is no harm in an Englishman ;"

a notion, by the way, which to a more mature and cultured understanding is nothing if not complimentary, but which occasionally proves somewhat galling to youthful self-esteem.

Be it as it may, however, on the memorable sunlit forenoon when I first received the beauteous ox-eyed dame into my studio, I was little disposed to grumble. Though, indeed, had I had to do with a less exquisite piece of fleshly perfection—I use the somewhat gross definition advisedly—I might have found cause to regret the choice of model I had made. But what man of twenty-four could find it in him to cavil at giggles or silly remarks when they dropped from lips of so gorgeous a crimson, of so bewitching a curve; to complain of childish restlessness, even of an apparently complete inability to understand the simplest directions, when these inconveniences involved the arrangement and re-arrangement of rounded arms and taper hands, the placing of a well-shod foot—hers was, upon my word, the nattiest I ever knew in the land—nay, once or twice, necessitated the laying of a finger upon a satin chin, or on a peach-textured cheek, the carmine and olive of which lay in such exquisite contrast beneath an indescribable amber glow, rarely seen outside a canvas of Murillo or Titian. And when I had, after all, nearly lost patience in endeavouring to convey to the something within that classically small head which answered for brains, that it was for no other reason than a purely artistic one that I wished her to let down her massive plaits, the vision of those glorious dense yet brilliant waves that fell to her knee in well-nigh fabulous luxuriance was one which fairly took my breath away. At

length I established her in an attitude which, while suited to my notion, was yet sufficiently comfortable to legitimise a hope that it might endure for a few minutes. And, having occupied her with a box of chocolates, my hand trembling with eagerness, I fell to tracing the warm, firm outline upon a blank canvas prior to introducing it into the larger expanse already adorned by my contending champions.

As the lines grew under my touch, seeming to my exalted fancy to take colour and substance already, there forced itself on my absorbed attention the sound of a knock at my door, which next opened to admit the pale oval faces, the crisp blonde heads of the Luganis, looking in upon me with twin smiles, one over the other's shoulder.

"We have a spare half-hour, and we remembered our promise, you see," said Ettore. And Carlo added :

"Now, amico, you can get on with those four legs of ours which you are so anxious to immortalise."

Even as, rather embarrassed, I rose to make known the presence of my fair visitor, I saw the two sets of grey eyes, shifting the unconscious sadness of their gaze about my room, suddenly flash with the same eager surprise, rapidly followed by the same fixity of marvelling admiration. Then from her rest detached herself the Catalani, her countenance suffused with conscious carmine, the flowing white draperies I had arranged about her falling away from the creaseless fit of her black silk dress as she hurriedly wound the wavy tresses into one great shining rope around her head.

The brothers bowed with their profound and

ceremonious courtesy as I performed the necessary introduction. The widow measured them with the velvet of her glance, and simpered acknowledgment; and presently, after a few minutes' general conversation, I found myself, a little to my amusement, a good deal to my chagrin, gently shifted to a quite secondary position on my own ground, while my handsome landlords, one on either side of my fair model, showed her the curios of my studio, explained, in rippling, limpid cascades of words such as can only escape from Italian lips, the plan of my picture, the nature of the paraphernalia I had collected for the purpose, and finally escorted her down-stairs, and placed her in her cosy open carriage. I stood under the porch unheeded; Ettore folded a silk rug across her knees; while Carlo, retaining, as if unconsciously, the grasp of her soft hand, transmitted her directions to the coachman.

We all three returned to the studio in silence; I, to tell the truth, too sulky to feel disposed to talk; and the brothers, as they threw themselves obligingly into whatever position I indicated, unusually meditative, and I thought—though that may have been my fancy—avoiding each other's glance.

The next meeting took place again in my studio, this time by pre-arrangement; indeed, it was at one of those informal early supper-parties I have already adverted to. I had got over my ill-humour; my admiration for the fascinating widow being, after all, of a more æsthetic than passionate nature, and not to be compared to the affection which I had come to entertain for my young masters, or to the absorbing importance of my picture. As far as I recollect, I was

actually disposed to be rather jocular about the apparently irresistible attraction of my various models for one another. She, as I have said, was not over-wise, and, after a glass or two of a certain treacherous sparkling wine—affected too, no doubt, by the ardour she descried in those two pairs of deep grey eyes—she grew very merry, and towards the end of the meal mockingly addressed Ettore :

"Why, Count, you have grown altogether pensive ! What shall we do to cheer you ? Shall I drink to your *amours* ? That is what you are thinking of so deeply, of course ?"—with a glance of coquetry so open that it would have seemed brazen in one less beautiful. "Here is to you—may you have success !"

"And will you then not drink to mine ?" put in Carlo, with a forced laugh.

"With all my heart," she cried, and extended her glass for me to refill. "I will make no jealousies between brothers. Here is good fortune to you too !"

Before she had emptied her beaker, I saw a flaming look pass between the Luganis, and a sudden misgiving thrust itself into my heart.

After that, on the days when my sitter came—and she was generous to prodigality of her visits now—the brothers were generally both at home, and one or the other would be, as if accidentally, coming downstairs even as she came up, or yet on the doorstep as she went out ; or they would seek my studio either alone or together. They took the most engrossing interest in my picture, but, strangely enough, invariably happened to call to see what progress I had made on those occasions when my model was with me. And if, by rare chance neither of them had

been visible during the whole of the proceedings, the painter was pretty sure to be reminded of the omission by the marked pettishness of his model, and suffered not a little at such times from the ingenious badness of her posing.

Now, with this change in my friends' methodical habits had likewise come a significant alteration in their humour. I heard no more the sound of Ettore's light baritone as he busied himself in the early morning to set his fencing gear to rights, or of Carlo's bird-like whistling, or the ring of their voices in jocular or affectionate interpellation to each other across the echoing rooms. Carlo's smooth face became more melancholy day by day, and Ettore's mature beauty took a cast of ever deeper sternness.

Once I met the younger on the Corso doing escort service by the radiant widow. Calling at her house the next afternoon, I crossed the elder coming down the stairs. On each occasion, when I returned home the other brother's voice resounded in the fencing-room to the accompaniment of clinking blades and the thud of lungeing feet—earning the common bread!

Whispers were going through the little town. “Lugani is now the cavalier-in-waiting on the rich widow,” was bruited on the piazza; and, as hitherto, the favourite pair had been interchangeable in their popularity, when it came to a matter of gallantry the position was one which would soon give rise to scandal.

One morning, as I came down for one of those private lessons (an extra course of which I had taken, though it did interfere with my time, for the sole reason that they gave me the right to pay their price into the

brothers' penurious exchequer) I halted outside the door on hearing the well-known voices for the first time raised in ringing bitterness.

"No," said one, "*I shall go out to-day. I submitted two days——*"

"And what if I say no?" interrupted the other haughtily. "Am I the elder or not? Who is master here if I decide?"

Then came a cry of helpless anger from Carlo: "Ah, cursed poverty!" and the boards resounded to the stamp of his broad-soled fencing shoe. I turned and fled softly up-stairs, in too deep distress over the fatal discord that had risen between the brothers to be struck by the ludicrous side of a dispute as to who should wear the family suit of clothes.

Matters stood thus between them when I received a letter summoning me in hot haste back to England. Never came summons at more ill-timed moment. My whole heart was wrapt up in my new friends. I was, as all who loved them truly, in serious anxiety about them, and could not bear to leave them at such a critical moment; besides this, my picture waxed in fairer promise every day. These were cogent reasons, indeed, to bind me to my old Palazzo. Yet go I must; my presence at home was imperatively required. With a very gloomy face I broke the news of my departure to Ettore that afternoon, and was not at all taken in as to the principal reason of the dismay which spread over his countenance. When I was gone, no more would the Catalani's arched foot come tripping it up the Palazzo stairs, no more would her lustrous eyes illumine the bare studio, her young presence warm the mournful air of the ancient house.

Said I, consolingly, “I shall return as quickly as possible; in a month, three weeks—who knows?—a fortnight. Meanwhile, the sooner I go, the sooner I shall be back. Perhaps I had better start to-morrow.”

“To-morrow!” echoed Ettore, with dropping jaw. “Oh no, dear friend, surely that is very precipitate—your great picture will suffer from this hurry, and then—aye!” catching at a bright idea, with a childish change of expression, “you had forgotten it. Our solemn public assault, next Thursday evening—we cannot let you go before the assault, you know; you promised to assist us.”

I *had* forgotten it, and seized upon the pretext quite as greedily as he; no doubt, too, my picture would be the better for a few more days’ hard work. There were four before Thursday. A good deal could happen in four days: perhaps I might see my dear friends in better mood before I left; be of use myself—who knows?

I calculated the outside limits of the delay I might allow myself, and finally despatched a letter announcing my departure on the Friday.

But the allotted time went by only to bring a darker look upon the brothers’ faces, a deeper gloom to the old palace. The witching widow came daily. She, too, had manifested disapproval, not to say indignation, at my change of plans; and, to increase her displeasure, neither Ettore nor Carlo now presented themselves as usual to mark progress in my studio, or on the stairs to snatch a few words with her as she passed up and down.

This strange behaviour struck me, though in a different manner, quite as unpleasantly as it did her.

There had always been a certain reserve about the brothers, a peculiar, dignified self-isolation which, for all our intimacy, kept me from venturing to touch upon personal topics; in their present high-strung state it would have required a bolder man than I to question them on the delicate subject of their mutual relations. I was, therefore, left to form my own conclusions, and their new departure, in face of Ettore's open attempt to delay my journey, seemed to me to bode ill.

On the fourth day both posing and painting became the merest farce. As my own eyes were chiefly intent on the door, my ears strained to catch the sound of steps that never came, I could not in decency rebuke my model for her ceaseless and pettish restlessness. At length, breaking a pause of sullen silence, she rose and crossed from her established seat to fix a discontented and absent eye upon my canvas.

"It is good you will not want me any more," she said, yawning, "for really you become duller every day up here."

I murmured a conventional protest, but, unheeding, she proceeded:

"What has become of my champions? why have they ceased to come?"

"I think you can best answer that question yourself," I said, wheeling round, not sorry to vent a little of the irritation accumulated within me against her. "What have you done to those unhappy boys who were so united, so cheerful——?"

"I!" she cried, flushing. "What drivels is this? Is it my fault that they should behave thus foolishly?"

“It is not *their* fault if they have both fallen madly in love with you,” I said severely.

Though I never was further removed from wishing to gratify her than at that moment, her rapacious vanity interpreted my words in a complimentary sense, and an involuntary smile crept on her face, softening her angry eyes.

“Do you not see,” I went on, warning to my subject, “do you not see that things cannot continue as they stand now? It is not your wish, surely, to have these fine fellows ready to cut each other’s throats for your sake! Will you never put them out of their misery, one way or another?”

She came over to me, and darted an eager look at my face.

“I wish I could!” she said crudely.

“You wish you could? You are talking nonsense,” exclaimed I; “you cannot marry both: you must make a choice—you must have some preference; they are both at your mercy. For God’s sake do not trifle with the poor fellows!”

“But what can I do?” Tears flashed into her eyes, she stamped her foot with sudden passion. “Could *you* say which you like best, Ettore or Carlo, Carlo or Ettore? Are they not both handsome as young gods, both charming, both lovable? If neither *will* speak, if neither *will* retire in favour of the other, how can *I* choose between them? You talk to me of preference: my preference shall be for him who first comes forward.”

Then, with an abrupt change of mood, and smiling gaily upon me through her wet lashes:

“Shall I not make a pretty contessa?” she asked.

Groaning in spirit at the frivolity of the creature who held the fate of my friends in her foolish hands, I sternly waived the irrelevancy.

"How could either have spoken," I demanded, "since you have so deliberately favoured both alike? It is your own doing if the brothers are now placed in so hideous a dilemma; and matters have gone so far—I can see no way out of it."

Her face grew dark again. With the unreasoning anger of a thwarted child:

"Luckily," answered she, pointedly insolent, "nothing hangs by your opinion."

"Unless, indeed," I proceeded, outwardly unruffled, although within, it must be owned, the description would not apply, "you had the generosity to go away—since they cannot."

After staring at me for a moment in speechless surprise, the beautiful Isabella gave a hard, short laugh.

"Booby!" quoth she, with emphatic scorn. "No, that is a little too transparent, even for you! No doubt *you* think you could manage to come after me, since they cannot, as you say. Tatata!" bearing down my furious disclaimer with renewed light-heartedness, and cheerfully reaching for bonnet and mantle. "A pretty dodge, caro, very, but I shall think of something better myself. Your arm, Signor Jealous, to help me down your precipitous stairs."

I lent her the support demanded with what I fear was an ill grace. And, conversing at the top of her naturally high-pitched voice with very obvious intent, she progressed slowly down the first two flights. On the landing of the floor occupied by the brothers she paused, tittering. Then admonishing me to silence

with an exaggerated gesture, she tripped up to the door of the fencing-room, listened for the span of half a second, and observing that there was no sound within, that the masters must be out, forthwith commanded me to show her over the mysterious premises, which the presence of pupils, she said, had hitherto prevented her from inspecting.

Knowing by this time its uselessness, I forbore remonstrance. Indeed, considering that she had already turned the handle, I should have been left addressing space. But I did not share the surprise—well acted or genuine—with which she halted on the threshold to greet the vision of two figures, one black the other white from head to foot, which silently emerged from different corners of the long room upon her entrance.

So this was the stage now reached by my poor friends in the course of their disease! With hearts raging at the constraint which kept them from their desire, they who had been so linked by generous affection spent the bitter hours watching like angry beasts to keep each other from the prey which could not belong to both. I shuddered at the thought. How long can it last? I asked myself with an inward moan, and what can the solution be? And I found myself regretting, with that cowardly shrinking from the sight of pain that most of us know in our egotism, those few days' delay I had given myself to follow their melancholy fortunes.

As she entered, they advanced hastily. But on their faces there was none of the lover's joy at the unexpected appearance of his mistress; nothing but dogged, bitter determination.

She stretched out both hands with her cursed impartial coquetry, and as each took and kissed the proffered fingers, their eyes turned again to meet in that look which, by this time, alas! was nothing new to me; a look of defiance, eager and unflinching as their own sword-blades in opposition.

She was very playful, and lavished bantering reproaches on what she termed their late lack of gallantry, and poutingly protested that, in truth, they did not deserve the honour of her presence at their function on the morrow. The brothers' gravity remained unshaken: nor could their fair visitant's most bewitching smile evoke more than the palest response.

In these various humours we made a tour round the room, during which, no doubt to give colour to her intempestive appearance, she expressed voluble interest in her novel surroundings: the long array of practice and other weapons glinting at intervals on the walls through the melancholy twilight; the gallery of cartouches and escutcheons—painted, as I knew, and with great heraldic taste, by the younger in honour of sundry of his pupils—the trophies of old arms, the blackened paraphernalia of bygone state, stern family portraits saved from the wreck of the house's fortunes and now gathered in this sole remaining reception-room to lend their countenance to the strange profession of the last of the Luganis,—all these things called forth well-meant if indiscriminate terms of admiration. I, nevertheless, thought to divine in the misleading profundity of her wandering gaze, dreams of gilded Viennese furniture, of gaudy brand-new upholstery for the not far distant future.

But the chill influence of the young men's

unnatural relations, which had fallen on me, as it now always did, from the instant I entered their presence, at length began to affect her. She grew pensive. The ring of her voice, which had, almost unaccompanied, awakened the echoes of the vast room, presently ceased. There came an oppressive pause.

Then, with a reproachful rustling of silk through the silence, she moved towards the door.

"I must go," she said, sighing deeply, yet as I fancied unconsciously. "Addio. Or shall I say, a rivederci? Come, you see I am a good child, and bear no malice. Till to-morrow?"

The young men made a simultaneous, impulsive movement forward, then halted abruptly, checked by some invincible mutual reaction, and stood on either side of the door bowing in silent, stiff farewell. Petulantly, with a shrug of her shoulders, she passed out, ignoring, as she pattered with rapping heels down the great stone steps, the arm I hastened to proffer.

Not until she was seated in her carriage did she deign to turn her clouded face on me.

"You are right," said she, and nodded, protruding her underlip with determined emphasis; "this cannot go on. I will devise something." A promise which, despite my advice of that very day, caused me much subtle uneasiness, for I had good reason to doubt the trustworthiness of either the head or the heart of her.

"No doubt," I thought, as I clambered back to my solitary quarters, "she means to precipitate the crisis on the next meeting." And my fears and misgivings growing ever sorer as the hours went by, I looked forward to the forthcoming function with heavy spirits, and was again moved to disregard, for the

nearer anxiety, a second summons from home which arrived that night and urged me not to lose a day in starting.

II.

WHEN, towards eight o'clock the next evening, I descended to the *piano nobile*, the scene in the fencing-room struck me as so animated and cheerful—the brothers, as they busied themselves receiving and seating their guests, looked so handsome, were to all appearance so self-possessed—that my first impulse was to laugh at my tragic forebodings. It pleased me, for the sake of our friends' popularity, to see the throng that had assembled at their bidding. The place was brilliant with uniforms, and there was a graceful sprinkling of fair faces; for, as Calarone had had occasion to tell me, the annual function at the Palazzo Lugani had come to be looked upon, in town and province, as a fashionable gathering.

Conspicuous among the spectators I soon espied my model established in a corner seat of the front row. I had to "open the assault"—a fate little coveted as a rule, but which I had volunteered to undertake as suited to my humble position of unknown amateur, and which Carlo endeavoured to soften by appearing as my opponent.

When my part of the performance was over, and I had been theoretically cut into small bits with irresistible, albeit courteous, dexterity, I sought out the Catalani's side, and thereto attached myself with the vague wish to be, at any rate, on the spot whatever was destined to happen.

She was not pleased to be gracious or communicative, turning her fine shoulders persistently upon me during the better part of the performance, so that I enjoyed a good view of the nape of her neck, cream-like between the dead black of her high silk gown and the living gloss of her hair, with ample opportunity to marvel afresh at the exquisite texture of her skin, and to realise how little I had been able to do justice to it in my unfinished masterpiece up-stairs.

In truth she seemed strangely preoccupied. When not engaged in watching our hosts in their peregrinations round the room or their triumphs on the *pedalina*, she would consult her programme with an earnest biting of her lips and a drawing together of her fine sable brows, which pointed to some absorbing train of thought.

Bout followed bout in rapid succession. Around us there was a roar of conversation, varied at times by moments of intense silence or bursts of applause. The brothers, whether engaged in entertaining their guests or in displaying their skill, were admirable as usual in their bearing. Sword in hand, they surpassed themselves. I have seen, I believe, well-nigh every swordsman of European note, but I never knew one who could emerge literally untouched, even by an inferior, from a lengthy assault, as they did that night, pitted though they were against representatives of many schools in high renown. One would have thought they wielded a magic blade; and indeed, to judge from the cries of admiration and astonishment evoked on every side by their skill, it was considered by competent witnesses as something little short of uncanny.

But to me, who had grown to know them so well, the secret of their unconquerable success soon became apparent. Beneath all the quiet courtliness of their manner I discovered an undercurrent of burning nervousness, a keen tension which found luxurious relief in the rhythmic fury of fence. I saw that the flush on their thinned faces, which had at first given them an illusory air of health and cheerfulness, was hectic, and that, though their eyes were bright enough under the excitement of the moment's task, they had that sunken, haunted look, born of prolonged sleeplessness; that look which but too often presages a not far distant break-down of mind or body—happy if it be but the latter! And when, on two occasions, at the end of especially brilliant bouts, even the vanquished opponent, bathed in perspiration, rose superior to his humiliation and was fain to express in flattering terms his wonder at the patrician's irresistible furia, I knew that the hand which was held out to him was dry and feverish, that the gracious smile and graceful words of deprecation were forced and mechanical.

The evening wore on. Neither of the Luganis approached us; but there was an indefinable feeling upon me that both watched our corner narrowly and—though I never saw them exchange a single word or sign—each other.

The Catalani grew restless, uneasy, fretful. Her rich cheek flushed and paled alternately; she threw herself about on her seat and tapped her dainty foot in irritated measure, while between her plump hands her programme became every moment more dilapidated. At length, during an interval before the

last part of the performance, she rose suddenly and commanded my escort to the refreshment-table—a privilege, be it noted, I had begged for a few minutes before, but which, while openly waiting for one of our hosts, she had tartly denied me.

When I had provided her with a glass of red syrup and some fruit, she all at once broke through her mutism and plied me with questions, which, mistrusting the motive that prompted them, I answered with a certain circumspection.

Had the brothers fenced well? This astounding query I could only meet with another:

Had she not seen for herself?

Oh! (impatiently) how could she tell? She knew nothing about such matters—somewhat disdainfully ejecting the pips of a pomegranate from between her lips as she spoke. Of course she had heard the tremendous ado over them; but that was their way in Italy. She wanted to know what I thought.

I told her, shortly, that there could be but one opinion: no one would come near the Luganis to-night—literally no one could touch them.

Had they been so marvellous as all that?

Marvellous was the word. There never was anything like it.

This seemed to throw her back, for a minute or two, into her reflective mood. Then she cast a sharp glance at me and another abrupt inquiry:

“And of the two, who fences best?”

I shrugged my shoulders according to the local fashion.

“Ah! that is indeed a question impossible to answer. They are absolutely equal.”

"But when they come together—and I see they are going to, presently—how will it be then? who will have the victory, do you think?"—smoothing her maltreated programme as she spoke, with a touch that trembled ever so slightly.

"Have I not told you they are equal?" I cried, provoked at not being able to guess what she was driving at, though it was so evident she had some settled purpose in her head. "How can any one tell who will have the best of it? There is not a pin to choose between them. They have always worked and practised together. Two could not be more fairly matched, were each pitted against himself, than they will be. Hits will be few, that is quite certain. But their assault is only an affair of show, and it does not matter in the slightest who scores the most, or even gets *la bella*. Every one knows that it must be decided by chance."

She bent forward in a sort of eager way to catch the words as they dropped from my lips. She sighed first, and then smiled as I finished.

"*La bella*," she repeated musingly; "yes, I heard them asking for it. What does it mean?"

But even as I entered upon a lucid explanation of this simple term of fencing jargon, I saw by her roaming eyes that her thoughts were elsewhere engaged.

I stopped, not a little put out; no man likes to find the ears into which he is pouring valuable discourse—more especially if the said ears be as delicate and pretty as a pink finger-shell—suddenly grown deaf to him.

She, however, paid no more attention to my silence

than to my speech; her whole face, suddenly illumined by a radiant smile, flushed rosily, tenderly, beautifully; her roving glance became riveted—I knew, even before turning round to find Ettore behind me, that she had at last caught the eye of one of her lovers.

That look of hers was a revelation to me. She was innocent of the heartless coquetry I accused her of—she loved the brothers indeed, but the wretched creature loved them both, and could not choose between them, by reason of that very love—it was worse than I had thought—horrible—unnatural—hopeless; but I pitied her.

Ettore paused when his furtive glance met the passionate brightness of her eyes; she beckoned to him with her fan, and he came forward as if irresistibly impelled. At the same instant I noticed Carlo with a bow detach himself hastily from the group he was conversing with in a distant part of the room, and make his way through the crowd towards us.

The widow gave a tremulous laugh, and, after sweetly acknowledging the elder’s greeting, turned to his brother with the same caressing smile.

“That is right,” she said, in a low voice, “I wanted to see you both; but it seems you were too much engaged to care for my congratulations.”

They looked down sombrely, and sighed. Then Ettore began some excuse which rang as hollow as his voice. She interrupted him hastily:

“Good—good! I forgive you. I know.”

The last words came forth upon a faint sigh which sounded like an echo of theirs. And for a moment, amid the strident hum and ceaseless movement of an

excited, good-humoured Italian crowd, the little group seemed strangely isolated in their silence. I saw the Signora Catalani's rounded bosom rise and fall with her hurried breath. And as she stood there, hesitating and glowing between the two who loved her, I saw the young men's downcast eyes suddenly raised upon her, and shoot forth a dual burning look which betrayed to me that their endurance had well-nigh reached its limits.

Wishing to put an end to a situation which would have been absurd had it not been rife with such tragic possibilities, I stepped forward, and was offering to reconduct the widow to her seat with an airy, commonplace remark suitable to the occasion, when a simultaneous glare from the masters made me draw back in dismay. Nor was the lady behindhand in expressing her disapproval of my officiousness.

"Thank you," she said, with a scathing glance, "one of these gentlemen will look after me. I need not detain you."

Then turning to her hosts and addressing them collectively, she plunged, with the air of one suddenly making up her mind, into a rambling sentence: she had been so ravished by their fencing: only she was so stupid—she wished she knew all about it properly; perhaps they would help her a little, make things clearer for her; she desired to be able to admire them as a true connoisseur, they must understand (with a flushed smile). For instance, would they tell her what *la bella* was? She had heard some one call out the words each time just before the end of the bouts; what did it mean?

A little apart from the trio I stood and listened

eagerly. What did *she* mean? I wondered, as she again put this trivial question, but this time with a straining eye, as if her future were hanging upon the answer.

Both men lifted their voice in reply, then both stopped; after a stern pause, during which I saw Carlo clench his fist, Ettore took up the broken thread alone.

“It means the last hit—that which decides the contest,” he said gravely.

“A strange expression,” she mused. “It has some meaning, I suppose. *La bella!*—it sounds as if there were some romantic idea attached to it.”

“None that I know of,” said the young man, with a transient look of surprise on his haggard face. “They call it so, I believe, because, being the last hit, it should be made as perfect, as beautiful as possible.”

The Catalani gave a laugh which fell quaveringly.

“Is it so, in truth? Do you know,” she said, “I can hardly tell why, but I keep thinking of our picture up-stairs, where you seem to be fighting so fiercely for the belle on the balcony, and I fancied”—she spoke haltingly, as if picking her words—“I fancied there might be some story, some association of that kind connected with it. But, then, you say it is the *last* hit that decides things in your sword bouts, whereas, in earnest, it would be the first; is it not so?”

The brothers listened now with a curious intentness. They did not speak, nor move the converging fire of their eyes from her. She opened her programme again, and consulted it once more, or feigned so to do.

"I have been told," she proceeded, in measured tones, like one reciting a speech by rote, "that your skill at arms, gentlemen—like the rest of your qualities—is so evenly matched that there is no choosing between you: so that whichever wins in this great bout which is to end your *fête* to-night, wins solely by fortune's favour. It will be very interesting—your fight together."

Here she faltered in her set speech, and dropped her long lids over the warm appealing gaze. And all at once I knew what her plan was, and felt surprised, indeed pleased, to find it so ingenious.

She went on with an effort:

"But would it not be more interesting to both of you and to—to those who watch you, if you were to fight for some prize; if, as in the picture up-stairs, *la bella* meant indeed——?" She stopped again, this time dead short, but with a glance at her hosts that was dazzling in its brightness, even to a wretched outsider like me; she saw there was no need to complete the sentence.

They threw up their heads with a proud, quick movement, and turning, looked at each other. And for the first time for many a weary day I saw their eyes meet with absolute acquiescence. After a moment of this silent intercourse, the elder nodded slowly to the younger, as if in ratification. Then presently they both wheeled round, bowed to their lady with what struck me as a strange solemnity, and moved away without a word.

She looked after them with a radiant countenance, and as I came up even deigned, in her good-humour, to bestow a smile upon me.

“So you are there still, friend,” she said, “eaves-dropping, I suppose? Well, what do you think of my woman’s wits now? Have I not found a way out of the difficulty after all, without having to follow your brutal suggestions? There! I can afford to be generous—you may take me back to my seat;—I hear the president rattling his pommel on the floor; the lists are open once more; only three more bouts, and my champions appear on the scene. By my faith, romance has not yet died out of the world, let people say what they like! Now, whatever happens, they will abide by it, and neither can complain. You saw how content they both looked. Say, was it not well thought? Have I not been clever?”

So she rattled on, but I could not rise to the level of her gaiety. I awaited the strange contest with an eager yet (I could not say why) an anxious heart. As for her, she had not a doubt; no sadness or compassion for the one of her lovers who was bound to lose her; not even a natural misgiving as to the wisdom of thus staking her whole future upon a freak of fate. It was my turn to be irresponsive as she allowed her recovered spirits to flow forth in a ceaseless, laughing stream of words. But a few moments ago I had thought to have a glimpse in her of a depth of womanly passion that amazed me; now she seemed as selfishly, irreflectively sportive as a child.

At length the period of suspense which seemed to weigh on me so much more than on her drew to its close. The president, the Colonel of Bersaglieri in garrison, a handsome old soldier with sweeping white moustache and breast covered with medals,

whom I had noticed in conclave with Ettore a few minutes before, stepped forward and claimed silence.

"Our gentle hosts," he announced, "Counts Ettore and Carlo dei Lugani, being somewhat fatigued by the numerous and arduous assaults they have furnished against the many swordsmen of note who have honoured them by their attendance this evening, beg to be allowed to limit the coming bout to the delivery of *one* successful hit. The Counts also desire, for the sake of variety, to slightly alter the programme, and fence this final bout with spadrons instead of rapiers."

A storm of applause followed, as the brothers (who had, as far as I could make out, not interchanged a word since the recommencement of the display) stepped briskly on to the prescribed space and bowed right and left, and then, but with downcast eyes, saluted each other.

Let alone the deserved popularity of the champions, between men so well acquainted with each other's play, so precise in their style, from nature and severe practice, so curiously matched in skill and strength, the bout, even if short, promised rich interest to both experts and ignorant. To me who knew the stake played for, who knew that the despair of one of my friends and the joy of the other depended on the merest chance, it was painful in its excitement. As to the woman whose fate was hanging in the balance, though at last mercifully silent, I thought, as she leant forward, panting and with glittering eye, that she seemed to draw more joy than anxiety from the spectacle.

With a clean firm click the shining sabres met

and parted, and now, after a rapid perfunctory give-and-take, began the strangest fight. By one accord the masters seemed to abandon all true sabre play, to discard cuts, and aim at scoring by the thrust alone.

Then evolved itself a lengthy "sword-phrase;" redoubled attacks and terrific returns, all with the point, and without an attempt at a pause on either side. Every second the exchange of thrusts became fiercer and swifter, till it was as fevered as mere foil play, despite the fact that the sabre of Italian schools is perilously thin and slender. Through the mastery and precision of each pass I could feel a frenzy, giving life to the very blades as it sought for the victory of that first hit. Under their masks the combatants' eyes, as of menacing wolves, shone with purple light, and the bared set teeth gleamed between drawn-back lips.

"This would be dangerous work," said I to my unheeding companion, trying to reassure myself by the sound of the words, "in less practised hands. But they know what they are about."

But while I spoke, Carlo's point—rounded, it is true, but hardly blunter than a table knife—was only turned aside from his brother's throat, bared between mask and collar, by an incredibly swift parry, and I noticed then for the first time, and with a flash of indescribable dismay, that the brothers wore light fencing masks, and had not changed their thin open-collared linen jackets, which, however sufficient protection against a pliant buttoned foil, were as good as useless against the sabre—above all, when wielded in such deadly fashion. I started up, a terrible suspicion creeping like an icy snake

round my heart. I tried to call out; in vain—my throat refused to bring forth a sound. But the next instant my insight was shared, my nameless thought was echoed; through the anxious silence which had settled heavily over the room, and allowed every dry clink of steel, every panting hiss of the brothers' labouring breath, to be heard with painful distinctness, there rang a wild shriek. She, the unwitting mover of this ghastly duel in disguise, had sprung to her feet open-mouthed, stricken by the awful realisation that now paralysed me.

"Stop—stop them—for God's sake, stop them!"

The anguished cry broke the spell which seemed to have held the president in the same thrall as the other spectators. He leaped forward to beat up the fratricidal blades. Too late! Ettore Lugani had secured the first hit. Even as the woman's wail still echoed in the air, meeting a furious lunge with a volte aside and a rigid time-thrust, he had driven his slender blade deep under his opponent's mask.

Carlo stood a second, quivering, while a bright red jet ran along the virgin steel; then, as his brother withdrew the bloody sword, fell forward on his face and rolled over on his side.

The victor stepped back; the weapon escaped from his hand and struck, clattering with lugubrious echo, upon the stone floor; with a stiff, mechanical gesture, he removed his mask and stood glaring at his handiwork with eyes that seemed to start from their orbits.

Then was the silence filled by a clamour of horror, the screams of women, the deep-mouthed exclamations of men. Scarcely knowing how it came

about, I found myself cleaving the excited, swaying crowd, and kneeling beside the wounded man.

I raised him in my arms, tore his mask away, and inanely strove to hold back the generous young blood, which, at each waning pulse, spurted forth, soft and warm, between my fingers. I have said *wounded!* Alas! his eyes were fast glazing. He made some faint signs, moving his hand restlessly as if in search of something, and languidly turning his dying gaze from side to side.

Calarone, who seemed to be the only one, save myself, in the affrighted assembly, who retained any species of self-control, and who was kneeling upon the other side helping me to support the lagging weight, suddenly rose, and seizing the petrified figure of Ettore by the shoulders, almost threw him on his knees upon the place he had himself occupied.

Instantaneously, as if by instinct, Carlo became aware of his brother's proximity; the uneasy look left his face; blindly he sought for the other's hand and raised it to his lips, sighing out with a supreme effort which brought a last terrible gush of blood from his wound:

“Fratuccio, forgive me—forgive!”

And presently I saw that he had passed.

I have no set sequence of recollections anent the remainder of that night; but amid the blurred confusion of my mind certain points stand out with ineffaceable clearness.

I remember how from the throng the widow ran forth and halted a little way off, bending forward with hands clasped, and lips distorted with a rictus of horror, looking from her dead to her living lover

in speechless agony; how Ettore, assisted to his feet again, stood helplessly where he was placed, passing his hand, red from the dead man's kiss, over his forehead, where it left a hideous smear; his eyes fixed in the same appalling stare, resting unseeing upon her.

Then she tottered towards him and broke into loud lamentations.

"O God, what have you done? Sweet Saviour, mercy! I never meant that! Oh, Ettore, Ettore, unhappy! how could you have thought I meant *that*?"

Never shall I forget the look upon Ettore's face as for the space of one short minute into his strained eyeballs a dim and awful consciousness crept back; with what inexpressible loathing, what horror, he recoiled from her touch!

She wrung her hands, lifting her voice still higher; and then some one laid a heavy palm upon her mouth and stifled the mad indiscretion of her clamouring remorse.

It was old Calarone.

"You rave," he said, roughly dragging her towards the door. "The emotion has turned your brain! It was an accident. Hush! it was an accident, I tell you! Come away!"

Soon after that a surgeon, who could but confirm what we already knew too well, appeared on the scene; and then the police.

To this day the unanimous shout which greeted them rings in my ears, the shout which was the echo of Calarone's fierce cry the moment before:

"It was an accident—a fencing-room accident; we all saw it. We will attest; it was an accident—an accident!"

I can see Ettore standing unheeding, rigid—seemingly, since that transient show of passion, as deaf, blind, and unfeeling well-nigh as the fair boy that lay in his blood at our feet—in the midst of all the confusion and his own imminent peril.

And then I remember Calarone clearing the room, and how, by-and-by, all were gone save him and the president, who was crying like a child, and the two terrible motionless figures, the one smiling as if asleep, the other with a look upon his face that turns me sick to think of. And next I was ejected, too. I felt, as, determinedly browbeating my incoherent protest, he thrust me forth, that the old artist's heart was bitter against me for my innocent share in that evening's work.

I went up to my room. I was to leave at dawn; I had to pack the rest of my things, which occupied me for a while mechanically, for there could be no question now of my ever returning to the shadow of this ill-fated house. But I could not make up my mind to go into the studio, I remember, for fear of the sight of that picture wherein the brothers were fighting, even as I had just seen them fight in such dire earnest, for the sake of the soulless, empty beauty I had been so proud to portray.

What has become of that picture? Are the brothers still fighting on? Is that woman still leaning over the balcony in mock alarm? Is it still in the old studio, and will it remain there till it crumbles into dust, a memento of two of the most noble and most lovable beings I ever knew, and of the most foolish woman?

As night wore on, I could bear the suspense

no longer; I crept down the stairs; from the instant I opened my door the sound of a distant tramping foot fell upon my ear. It grew more distinct as I descended; when I reached the landing of the first floor I found that the door of the fencing-room was ajar, and that the noise of the restless foot proceeded from within.

 Holding my breath, on tiptoe I drew near.

 In the centre of the vast black room now stood a little truckle bed hung with white, and on it lay the inert remains of him who, so short a time ago, had been full of seemingly unconquerable energy. A few candles round the couch, and the white draperies, made a sort of little oasis of light amid the surrounding gloom. At the head of the bed sat Calarone, his great white beard flowing on his breast, motionless as a carven figure, save for the moving gleam of his eyes. And up and down the long floor, with ceaseless beat, went Ettore, tramp, tramp, tramp. God alone knows what despair was brooding behind the livid mask of his face.

 Once he stopped and looked at the peaceful form upon the bed, with a frightful staring gaze, like a man under the thrall of some appalling dream, and then he struck his forehead with a fierce hand, and cried in a toneless voice:

 "The mark of Cain—the mark of Cain!"

 The flickering light shone upon his bent head. It was still red with his brother's blood.

 I turned away and stole back to my room; and following me was the sound of that weary tramp again. And as I sat at my open door hour after hour, all through the dead still night, it went on

echoing up through the bare stone passages, muffled, relentless, awful.

At rare intervals would come a pause, and then I knew Ettore was standing beside the corpse as I had seen him stand, and there would fall through the black silence the murmur of his agonised refrain. And after that the tramp once more.

At length the dawn broke. The *facchini* I had ordered struggled sleepily up-stairs for my luggage and heavily down again; the carriage which was to take me away drew up clattering in the deserted street. I took a lingering look round the room, now filled with such heartrending associations, and descended for the last time the great, cold stairs.

Outside the fencing-room I stopped, my heart yearning to take a final farewell of my friends.

The door was shut. All seemed quiet. Softly I turned the handle, and looked in.

Ettore was on his knees, by the smiling clay. His shoulders were heaving in an agony of sobs; Calarone, his face turned towards the chill, grey light which stole in through the high windows, had his hands folded as if in prayer.

Neither saw me. I closed the door and ran down-stairs to my carriage; and as I went I think I, too, was muttering a prayer, to thank God that Ettore had found tears at last.

* * * * *

As soon as I had arrived in England, I wrote to Calarone imploring him to send me some tidings of the unfortunate survivor of the brave pair who had, in brief madness, wrought each other's undoing. He did not reply. I wrote again, and yet again.

At length came a short and characteristic letter, through every line of which I discerned the same ill-concealed hostility he had shown me on the night of Carlo's death.

"You are curious for news," he wrote; "I do not think I have any to give that can be especially gratifying to you; however, I will do my best to answer your questions. Ladies first for ever. The Catalani, that beautiful and amiable person, the privilege of whose acquaintance you generously shared with so many of your friends, left our town the same day as you did. A double loss for us. I have cared little, I confess, to follow her further movements, but I have heard that rumour is at present coupling her name with that of some Florentine *cavaliere* celebrated in connection with a special make of silk blanket. The Palazzo Lugani is sold. Count Carlo Lugani, who lost his life by that deplorable accident we all were unfortunate enough to witness, lies in the family vault, the only remnant of all their once vast possession which that ancient race could now call its own. Count Ettore is dead too—dead at least to the world and to all who knew him. The Carthusian monastery, upon the slopes of the Apennines, which you used to be fond of admiring from your studio window, is the tomb of the last of the Luganis until the time comes for him to join his brother."

THE "RENOMMIST."

The following incidents in the life of a certain Saxon student, at the time when all parts of Germany were either the conquered province or the unwilling ally of France, I remember hearing—long, long ago—from my father's own lips. He was even then an old man, whilst I was still very young, not more than twenty years of age, perhaps.

To-day the same number of autumns rests upon my head as bowed my dear predecessor's when he told me the tale. As I smoke his old pipe and, musing, warm my rheumatic limbs at the selfsame corner of the hearth where I used, in the days of my strength and lustiness, to see him pensively ensconced, his very words come back to me with singular vividness. And when I set them down—as near as I may to his narration yet in the English tongue—I would fain try and make them convey something of the impression they produced then upon me, as though his voice went forth again (bridging an abyss of eighty years), to relate, now in the last decade, an episode that, in the first of this century, had a wholesale influence on our family fortunes.

ON the bare, sunlit hill-top, Kaspar, the *Studiosus in Literis Humanioribus* on his migration tour—very leisurely if not actually erratic—from Jena to

Heidelberg, paused to rejoice in the wide expanse of view, doffing his cap to yield his brown locks to the fanning breeze, and dreamily to refill the bowl of his great china pipe. Before reaching this long-desired goal of his morning's march, a slow ascension through solemn woods (pine woods, with their mysterious vistas of endless galleries, leading on all sides to undefined green gloom; with their strange, at times haunting, even awful sounds, as of myriad sighs rising or falling together under every pulse of wind) had disposed Kaspar, first to cryptic speculation, and thence to a state of mind cognate, but better suited to his bright young years—to a yearning, in fact, for the poetic fixing of evanescent impressions.

Having filled his pipe-bowl and greeted smiling nature with a long, grateful gaze, he sat down on a broad stone, apologising, in brotherly terms, for the disturbance, to a green lizard that, spread in curves of beauty on the hot grey lichen, had been voluptuously drinking-in the sun's rays by every pore. But, instead of turning the last of his tavern bills, which he now drew from his pouch, into a spill for tobacco-kindling purposes, he absently smoothed it out, and with the half of an odd end of pencil, produced from the same receptacle, proceeded slowly to set forth in verses of fanciful metre something of the glad wide scene around him; the broad waves of tree-clad hills dying away into the purple bloom of distance; the swift-gliding shadows over this great sea of foliage; the stillness of the noontide hour rendered tangible at moments by the very far-off echo of some woodman's axe or the occasional call of a lonely deer in the valley; and overhead the great white cloud,

dazzling in its purity, that was now majestically rising behind one of the green waves, ascending, ever greater yet ever pure, in slowly unfurling volutes against the living blue.

Yet, presently, as the glorious heat grew upon him, the physical delight of scenery lost of its first keenness, and the power of translation began to fail; Kaspar folded his immortalised bill, prosily struck flint against steel, ignited his pipe, and after exhaling a few white puffs into the mountain air, fell to musing on the more material prospects of his journey.

He must be some fifty miles from the Saxon High School, and as far again, perhaps, from the great Badish seat of learning; so much or so little he knew, and cared less, this summer weather. But now the inner man began to clamour for the comforts of inhabited regions.

He rose and scanned the horizon towards the south-west, where lay his general direction. Against the fast expanding white cloud, his eye, under the screening hand, espied in the long distance, like a stationary butterfly, the flaunt of a flag, and he was pleased to imagine it as displayed from the main tower of some Hof, hidden by the verdant screen.

"Where the standard streams," sagely ratiocinated Kaspar, "the house is alive. Near such an one lies commonly at least a hamlet, in other words a civilised settlement, wherein, no doubt, a slice of rosy ham on subfusk bread, a radish and a tankard of foaming beer, can be laid in the cool arbour of a hospitable inn for the refecation of weary travellers."

And, stimulated by the prospect, he struck for his new goal, and, descending the other side of the

hill, plunged once more under the shadow of the forest, at the smartest gait of his tall boots.

The end of the hour brought him once more in the open, in a broad valley which led the waters of a small tributary, joyously roaming and foaming over the boulders, towards one of our majestic German streams.

And there, on the far bank, half commanding the crest, half clinging to the steep sides of a noble vineyard hill, stood indeed a castle, with high-reared standard heralding its presence far and wide.

"An old Ritterburg," mused Kaspar, stopping to rest with hands crossed on his staff, "once the filthy nest of titled forest robbers, now, however, watching no longer for the ransom of travelling merchants, but with tower, loopholes, and mantlets masked by overgrown creepers, with fosse and barbican turned to pleasure-ground, with portcullis ever struck and bridge ever lowered, presiding peaceably over the growth and welfare of precious vines. Good!—Gracious Gods! but Sol Apollo is achieving rare deeds on yonder hot crag. I must to-day break with the economy of the itinerant student and barter a silver piece against a draught of native wine. Yet, alack!" he pursued, looking up stream, "the village with the cool green room lies, as in duty bound, beyond the lord's ground. How to cross this Jordan to the land of the marvellous grapes?"

A water-mill afar lazily turned its great wheel. Somewhat nearer, a man in a boat was raising a net full of silver-glancing fish.

Kaspar hailed him with lusty throat, and in silent but friendly obedience the fisher drew his little craft nearer, received, and, with a few strokes of his paddle,

ferried the wayfarer across the stream, as silent as Charon the while, though Kaspar was conscious of being surveyed with astonishment and pleasure. As he sprang out of the boat with cheery words of thanks, the boatman spoke :

"The path on the left, Sir Student," said he, smilingly dropping the proffered groat into his red waistcoat. "The side postern is open."

Kaspar stood awhile wondering; the nearest way to the village was obviously the riverside path, to the right. Then he turned for explanation.

"Yes," cried the man, already in mid-stream, and back at his work, "there," and waved his arm to the left.

"He will have it," said the student; "be it so," and, shrugging his shoulders, began to ascend the steep way in the direction recommended.

The path, scorched and arduous on the flanks, sank on the crest of the hill between umbrageous tangles of greenwood. Soon the grey walls, with their old-time, forbidding look, loomed loftily in front, and he halted in some perplexity to consider his next step.

At that moment a young woman, in the short skirts of the peasant class, appeared at the turning of the path.

As she advanced and marked the traveller, there seemed to come a flutter of curiosity and excitement into the very ribbons, broad and black, of her head-dress.

She fixed upon him her bold blue eyes, and with a roguish smile :

"Well, you have let yourself be hoped for long enough," quoth she.

Her manner, coquettishly familiar, was even more enigmatic than the words.

"One moment, fair child," said the young man, excited and inquisitive, striving to bar her way with a view to further parley.

But, with the frisk of a red petticoat and of two long yellow tresses, she escaped, and crying:

"Straight on, Sir Student. The door is open," disappeared round a corner of the winding hedge, and he could hear her clear young laugh ring again as she ran down the path.

"By Heaven!" said Kaspar, complacently stroking his downy moustache, "this waxes strange—ay, and enticing. I *will* enter the open door."

The open door was in the curtain of the walls, between two round flanking towers which, in gaps between their crumbling grey stones, now gave paternal support to tendrils of wild rose, clematis, and honeysuckle.

Through this postern Kaspar noted a shady, silent, sleepy courtyard. He entered deliberately, though with unconsciously subdued footsteps. The place seemed deserted but for a young dog that rose from his sleep in a corner, and, after a few interrogative barks, came forward with many demonstrations of friendship.

Attracted by the noise, an old man now showed himself in a doorway opposite the entrance, and after examining the new-comer under his palm for a moment, gave suddenly a little laugh of exultant welcome, and made a low bow.

"Gracious Master! God has sent you," said he, and with senile hurry disappeared, to reappear an

instant later on the threshold, crying out with an adjuring gesture:

"I will seek the Lord. Sweet Master, to the dining-hall. But prudence is the word—gently!" and with a soft wink, which trembled over a tear, he vanished once again.

Kaspar stood dumbfounded.

"Sweet Master!" he repeated, "Prudence!" Were the sweet master prudent indeed, he would forthwith turn his back upon this nest of lunatics. "Yet," he added, mentally comparing the cool, inviting doorway that the old man had indicated with the parched and dusty road that led abroad, "if they be mad, their method at least is friendly. Should I not be a churl to spurn such hospitable intent?"

He looked around once more. The dog had returned to his couch. Through some open windows came into the stillness of the court the murmur of many voices. Tickled with the humour of the situation, and warming to the adventure, he cast deliberation from him, crossed the portal, and ascended the broad stone steps; very bare they were, very substantial, very cool.

On the first floor a long gallery, equally plain and severe, stretched itself before him, at the end of which was a broad oak-panelled door.

Towards this Kaspar advanced with elaborately cavalier ease, and knocked. Receiving no answer, he tried the lock, and then, unbidden, entered. He found himself in a large hall, with groined vaultings, lighted from one end only by tall, deep-recessed, lancet windows, warm with proud heraldic tinctures. A floor of blackened oak enhanced the bare whiteness

of the stone walls. Down the length of the chamber ran a long massive table, at one end of which plate and napery were laid.

Drawing nearer, he saw that, although two persons had evidently eaten there, a third place, undisturbed, seemed still to await a guest. He took a turn round the sonorous hall, and waited; examined the tarnished pictures that hung high on the walls; peeped out of the window into the empty courtyard; tried to decipher the components of the ancient coat carved on the high mantelpiece, then halted wistfully once more before the table, and wondered why he was there, and what his next step should be.

The empty place suggested the answer; he was hungry; he was tired; he was thirsty. Here stood a chair, here were but incompletely demolished dishes; best of all, here was wine.

He bent forward and critically inspected the long bottle, yellow, slender, nearly full, that hobnobbed with a tall rummer of seagreen glass, beaded and shapely.

"A diamond in mount of brass,
An Emperor in rags;
A noble wine from Rhenish crags,
In coarse or clumsy glass,"

sang he under his breath. "The wine is golden, the beaker worthy of the liquor. Our Castellan, whoever he be, is, at all events, apparently no Philistine. But he tarries overmuch. *Sir Student*," said Kaspar suddenly aloud, raising the glass and gripping the bottle neck, "*Sweet Master*, a glass of wine? *Prosit!*"

The rummer was forthwith filled and gravely emptied. Smacking his lips, he sat down.

"'Twere a sin," he argued, filling a new brimmer,

"to let such a generous bottle languish longer unfinished. *Pace* Gambrinus the Great, but this is even better than the tankard in the green arbour. Upon my *cerevies* it is!"

He was in the act of drawing a plate before him when the door-lock grated, and a woman, whose cap and apron betokened the position of a housekeeper, halted on the threshold, blocking the entrance with goodly proportions. She gazed a while, with anxious scrutiny, at the student and his comfortable appearance at table.

"Now," thought Kaspar, "now at last for explanations, on both sides." And, already stimulated by his double libation, he cocked a merry eye on the old dame, and stretched his long boots under, his arms over, the table, ready to defend his excellent if irregular position.

But with an ejaculation, "God in Heaven! it is true, then?" the old woman merely dropped a trembling curtsey, and with precipitation withdrew.

"A slight mistake somewhere, evidently," said Kaspar philosophically, and helped himself with no niggardly hand to the viands before him; "unless, indeed, the humble Studiosus has been transmogrified during his passage through the mysterious forest into some noble lordling. Well, *carpe diem*, gather the roses, enjoy the fleeting hour—it is sound, ancient wisdom."

The hour fled; Kaspar's hunger diminished with the size of the pasty. The golden soul had long fled from the bottle, and yet the self-invited guest lingered undisturbed.

The song of a blackbird floated in through

the open window from a neighbouring coppice. The mysterious notes of that prince of songsters, the fumes of the wine, the fatigue of the long march, the heat of the hour, combined to evoke a pleasing dreaminess in the student's mind. He laid his elbows on the table, his forehead in his hands, and in a short while lost, in profound sleep, all consciousness of his strange situation.

He had a thirst-tormented dream, throughout which he became the Emperor Barbarossa, in his silent abode under majestic *Burgruinen*, calling, between bouts of prolonged oblivion, for yet another tankard of Rhenish, and conjuring one of those troublesome bodies, who would from time to time curiously peep in upon him, to stop their bobbing curtseys, and inform him whether the blackbirds were still singing on the outer hillsides.

From this he suddenly awoke, in some anguish, to see the door in front of him open and an old gentleman, of the most singular appearance, advance towards the table and sit down at the high end.

The new-comer, though of no commanding stature, had yet an unmistakable presence. He was thin, bony, and maimed (one arm was replaced by a glittering steel hook), and had a nose, the high bridge of which rose, falcon-like, almost level with the deep-set, wide open, grey eyes. A white moustache, short and bristly, helped to give an incongruous appearance to the bagwig, with long tail and flash after a fashion thirty years dead, that covered his square massive head. Yet there was no mistaking the old soldier, despite the antiquated civilian attire.

"A hussar of Ziethen," vaguely thought Kaspar

(he hardly knew why, and for the moment too much dazed to distinguish reality from fancy), as he met the severe gaze of the grey eyes.

Then, realising suddenly that he might be in the presence of the master of the Castle, he rose to his feet, made his best bow, and began an apology, elaborate, if somewhat confused.

The extreme severity of the old man's gaze relaxed, but it was with much imperiousness of gesture and with a stern voice that he interrupted Kaspar.

"Thou hast come. It is enough. Hush, I say! I forgive. Be dutiful in future."

The words were snapped out like military commands. The next instant, however, the speaker's rigid demeanour seemed all at once to forsake him; he interrupted himself with a low, inarticulate murmur of much tenderness, and the student, to his inexpressible dismay, found himself clasped by one strong arm to a wildly beating heart.

"Indeed, sir," he gasped, as soon as he could draw breath, "indeed, this is some strange delusion," but the words died away on his lips under the yearning joy of the old man's eyes, and courage failed him for the necessary explanation.

He stood, with downcast look, nervously fingering the tobacco-pouch that dangled at his belt, vainly casting about in his mind for an issue to his perplexity.

The old man, after some coughing and hesitation, broke the silence once more, with a resumption of his former harsh voice, though it failed now and then with a quavering note.

"Thou seest," pointing to the table, "thy place has ever been ready. Thy room is waiting. Go thou now

and kiss Elsa. She was right; she announced thy return. Go, I say!"

Obeying the impulsion of the arbitrary hand that was laid heavily on his shoulder, Kaspar took a few steps in the direction of a door to the left. With his fingers on the handle he halted again in uncertainty, and looked back. But once more the rapture he saw in the old eyes cut into the lad's soft heart, and, in silence, he went forth.

"Perhaps Elsa may prove of good counsel, whoever she be," thought he, striving to shake off a guilty feeling that lay unreasonably heavy on his mind. And then, being young, and the wine still tingling in his blood, his spirits rose up with a bound at the sudden thought of the task enjoined upon him. "Go and kiss Elsa." Elsa must be young, beautiful, as behoves a *châtelaine*, and were she as willing to welcome the unknown guest as was the head of this singular household, why, then——

The everlasting romance which fills such madcap heads drove all hesitation to the winds.

With light steps he traversed the long, flagged, sonorous corridor, looking, as he passed along, into sundry bare and darkened rooms, ascended a winding stair that offered itself in the way, and was finally brought to a halt before a closed door, where, suddenly, despite himself, a curious shyness seized him.

But the intense fascination of a closed door, behind which lurks a mystery, and the radiant image of the unknown Elsa which now filled his fancy, drove him irresistibly onwards; he knocked very gently, and receiving no answer, with renewed boldness entered.

The room was empty, but his eye brightened with triumph as he looked around.

"Here is the casket at last," said he, "but where is the jewel?"

It was a very bower, fresh with roses, feminine with dainty odds and ends. By one of the windows stood a tall gilded harp; against the wall a white and pink wood spinet; in a corner a tapestry frame showing pleasant design and blend of colour.

"Yes," repeated Kaspar, "here is the nest, but where is the bird?"

He looked around once more, and then became aware of an inner apartment curtained off from the room in which he stood by quaint hangings of tapestry, and approached by a couple of steps.

With pulses throbbing at his own temerity, the young man stole towards what he guessed to be indeed the *sanctum sanctorum*. The curtains were slightly parted.

"Stay, Kaspar, before it is too late," conscience whispered; but the indiscretion was too easy to be resisted.

There was Elsa; Elsa in the flesh surpassing the Elsa of the young man's summer fancy, surpassing it as high as the fragrant mountain breeze surpasses the hot breath of a fan.

She lay asleep on a couch; her fair cheek, gilded by the sun's kisses, resting on one round white arm bared to a puffy sleeve. On the floor, with flustered leaves, stood on end the book that obviously had fallen from her hand. The thin white dress, high waisted and clinging, revealed in the twilight of the blinded window a divinely young and lithe figure;

a few curls, black and glossy, escaping deliciously, in the abandonment of the hot hour's siesta, from the high knot of hair, strayed as far as the throat, and there rose and fell softly under the quiet pulse of the sleeper's breath.

Blood mounted to Kaspar's young head from which the quintessence of the long bottle had not yet all evaporated. For a minute of world-oblivion he feasted his eyes; then, slowly fascinated, bent forward to kiss the lips so temptingly parted; but, smitten with manly shame, recoiled in time, and barely grazed with his breath the hand that hung listlessly over the side of the couch.

Slight as it was, the touch caused the long eyelashes, black even as the heavy curls, to part fluttering and reveal deep blue orbs that fixed themselves for one moment with quiet surprise on the intruder, and the next flashed in an ecstasy of joy. Then, before he could realise what happened, she had half-sprung from her cushions and thrown herself upon his shoulder.

He felt the warm greeting on his cheek, the cool, soft, bare arms round his neck, and his soul rose with stormy gust to his throat. He dropped on his knees, enfolded her in his arms, and returned the kiss passionately, upon her lips.

But in such fashion, apparently, the girl had not expected her welcome to be answered. She quickly drew back, and holding him by the shoulders at arm's length, peered keenly with dilating pupils into his face.

Then into those eyes, beneath the scrutiny of which his own guilty glances were fain to sink, there flashed in quick succession, first, a sudden terror, next, a very blaze of anger.

She sprang to her feet and thrust him from her with such vigour that, kneeling as he was, he well nigh measured his length upon the floor.

"Who are you?" she cried, aflame, with strangled voice, "how dare you be here, whoever you be!"

Kaspar hastily rose, and retreated in conscious shame before her.

"Who are you?" she repeated, stamping her little laced sandal, "who presume to enter my room and trick me so?"

He drew back yet another step.

"Gracious lady," faltered he, in agonising perplexity, "Lady Elsa, I crave your forgiveness. I—indeed no discourtesy was meant. God forefend!"

Here he halted, inexpressibly abashed. His gallant exploit seemed indeed to sink poorly before the girl's indignation.

She measured him with a glance, now contemptuously relenting; at least, she had nothing more to fear from the invader. It seemed even as if her wealth of anger were somewhat wasted upon this trembling penitent.

"Your name, sir, who know mine so glibly; your purpose here?" she said in calmer tones, and half turned away to look over her shoulder with a scorn that robbed the poor student of the remnant of his self-possession. Mechanically he murmured the customary chain of his denominations.

"Kaspar Walther, from Wiemar, student in Jena, Thuringer Nation."

There sprang the shadow of a dimple into Elsa's cheek, and then upon her quieter wits the word "student" seemed to work a sudden enlightenment.

With a swift change of countenance she glanced at the befrogged green tunic, the parti-coloured pouch, the peaked cap, the cavalier boots.

"Student, said you?" she said, and stopped awhile, thinking. Then looking at him wistfully, "I think, perhaps, I understand now," she went on; "you have met my father?"

"Yes," cried Kaspar, recovering power of speech in his relief at the turn matters seemed to take; "that is, if the same be an old gentleman in odd pigtail and flash, . . . and with a hook."

"And he, too, sir, took you for someone near and dear to him?"

"That most evidently, gracious lady. Indeed, I, the merest passer-by, have been here received by everyone as a long-expected guest. It was your father himself who ordered me—masterfully, as seems to be his way—in the direction of your room. 'Go and kiss Elsa,' said he. I had drunk wine, I had been asleep—was still half as in a dream. I know not how to excuse myself."

This time, as his words failed him, the maiden seemed to view his embarrassment without disfavour; a faint smile even quivered for an instant on her lips.

"I must speak with you," she said, after a reflective pause, burying her dimple in a sigh. "Wait for me yonder," and with one hand she pointed to the outer room, while she mechanically raised the other to her head to pat her curls, blushing to find them in such disorder.

Kaspar retired with a lingering look, glowing again with the recollection of that delirious moment which the fair Elsa's now softer mood allowed him to look back upon with renewed rapture. In a little while

she joined him, having restored unimpeachable order to the riot ringlets. Motioning him to a seat, she took one herself at some little distance.

"Now," said she, "tell me exactly how this strange mischance has come about."

The anxiety of her expression sobered him on the instant. With a simplicity that more than once brought a smile to her face, he obeyed the injunction.

"You see," he concluded, eager to excuse himself in her eyes, "and you understand, I hope, that I did not wantonly allow your father to remain in his delusion; but, in very truth, I was afraid to explain; he was in such joy, so agitated——"

She interrupted him with a heavy sigh.

"My poor father!"

He looked at her inquiringly, his whole soul in his eyes.

"My father is mad, sir," she said, answering the mute query with grave directness. "A quiet madness," she went on, unheeding his quick movement of horror, "very melancholy, yet perhaps—who knows?—a blessing for him. I fear his sufferings would be greater were his poor wits less unhinged."

She paused, and choked down a rising sigh with a resolution that spoke of long habits of self-control, and meeting once more the young man's look of sympathy, said gently:

"And I owe you, too, an explanation—all this must seem evidently strange to you, sir. But you have already guessed that you have been taken, by the servants, for their unknown young master, by my father for his repentant son, and by my half-awakened eyes, in the dim light, for my brother."

An exquisite carmine rose to her cheek, for all her deliberation, as she spoke the last words.

"Am I, then, so like him?" asked Kaspar, colouring, too, under a delicious shiver.

Her eyes rested observantly upon his keen face.

"Indeed there is no great likeness," she said, after a moment, "save that you, too, are young, dark, and tall, even as he was—alas! none of us know what his looks may be now—and that you wear the same dress, more or less, that he did when we last saw him; yet enough to have misled my poor father, who remembers little, and sees all things through the eyes of sick fancy."

"But the servants?" timidly asked Kaspar, to whom the net of misapprehension in which he had been encompassed was yet inexplicable.

She smiled upon him sadly, yet with a friendliness that made his soul rejoice.

"Nay," she said, "I see you must needs have the whole pitiful story." And then, folding her hands upon her knee, she began—not without eagerness, as one who has long been silent—to tell her tale.

"Although living now in this southern state," she said, "we belong to a Brandenburg family, and dwelt formerly in Prussia. My father, who till then seemed to have iron strength, was first broken down by the horrible reverses, and the untold outrages that befell our poor country after the year 'seven. He fought in the rear-guard at Jena; and after our defeat there (you know, of course, how mercilessly the invader hunted down our men), he lost his right arm, and was otherwise wounded. He recovered bodily power, it is true, but the constant thought of the yoke that crushed our people was too much for his pride.

Mutilated as he was, he thought he never could fight the enemy more—though, indeed, I believe he could still have led his men, had there been men to lead, with more fire than anyone—and ever brooded bitterly upon our misfortunes, till we saw his mind daily losing more of its balance. My two brothers were then with us. Konrad, the elder, light of heart, and brimful of energy, found diversion enough in the occupations of youth to keep him much away from his melancholy home. The younger, like my father, refused to make merry while our country was bleeding and humiliated. Then, one day he, Otto, brought us great news: the English, he said, were raising a German legion to help them fight the French in Spain!

“Full of ardour, he left us to join them. My father—although he did not, I think, quite understand the scheme—knew that his son had gone to meet our arrogant foe, and exulted over it. And from that moment he looked with disfavour upon the eldest who scornfully refused to go and fight as a mercenary of the English king. It was then that Konrad first showed that beneath his levity of disposition there was a will as strong as my father’s.

“‘Let Prussians remain on their land,’ he used to say roughly; ‘the time will come.’ But the time never came, as you know! Meanwhile he left us—indeed, it was more or less against my father’s will—to go to the University; and shortly afterwards, we received the terrible tidings of Otto’s fate. ‘Killed in the first engagement.’”

She ceased for a moment, bending her head, her pretty face quivering at the recollection, and tears

glinting between her black lashes. Kaspar longed to throw himself on his knees, to gather the precious pearls with adoring lips.

"Oh, that was a cruel time," she resumed, with an effort. "My father, roused from the state of apathy he had fallen into, was in a very frenzy of despairing rage. Hatred and the longing for revenge were again uppermost in his mind. 'I have another son,' he cried, cursing his own impotence; 'where is *he*, what is he doing when there is fighting to be done against the accursed Welsh?'

"It was only with the utmost difficulty that I prevented him starting off, at haphazard, to seek Konrad. If I had dared leave him, I would have gone myself to bring my brother home; I wrote many letters, but knew not if they reached him, for he was wont, I know, to go every six months from one University to another, only writing to me at odd times, to request money. I have managed—you must know—business, as well as household matters ever since my father's illness, and although Konrad has an independent fortune of his own, it seems you students can make away with terrible quantities of gold. It turned out, however, that my letters were delayed. As soon as he received them—for at heart he is good—Konrad came home at once.

"Well do I remember the meeting. It was a hot July day, even as now. I had coaxed my father out, thinking the air might do him good. But I could not get him to leave the garden; we lived near the town, and he shunned the chance sight of a Frenchman. We were pacing to and fro in silence, when there came a great clangour of spurs and sword, and

the tread of heavy feet up the flags of the alley. My father pricked up his ears and caught my arm: 'Thy brother!' he cried exultantly. How he knew I cannot imagine, and for a moment I deemed him wandering indeed. The next instant, however, Konrad himself stood before us. As soon as he laid eyes upon him, my father's face grew black as thunder: he had thought to see a soldier.

"The poor boy advanced, with what struck even me as an insolent gait; I am sure he did not mean it, he seemed to have taken upon himself strange manners and habits during his course of University life.

"He was dressed in some ways like you, but with inconceivable extravagance; canon boots reaching half-way up to his hips, weighted with enormous gilded spurs, his sword trailing arrogantly on the ground, his hair flowing over his neck. He had let his beard grow; in his hand was a pipe as long as a messenger's staff, from which, before saluting my father, he actually blew a last cloud, striking as he did so an easy attitude. . . .

"I have no heart to tell you in detail what followed; some servants had gathered in the doorway to see the clanking new-comer, but, in his sudden passion, my father was blind to their presence. There was a horrible scene. Poor Konrad! he had come back to us with the kindest motives, I know. He was not callous to our loss; I saw his lips quiver when my father hurled the name of Otto at him. All his fantastic affectation was harmless enough, God knows. But my father—it was then that I fully realised to what extent his mind was affected, for, if before he had been always stern and somewhat

tyrannical, I had never known him unjust—taxed his son before the gaping household with cowardice, and ordered him in furious language to go and take his brother's vacant place in the ranks.

"Konrad, flaming under the insult, indignantly refused. I have told you he had a stubborn spirit, and he did not understand my father's condition. I should have warned him in my letter, but there are things that seem too cruel to write, and, as I said, I did not know myself to what extent the evil had increased.

"Then my father's fury broke forth indeed—a very frenzy seized him.

"'You—you a son of mine!' he shrieked, 'you wear cavalier spurs! You cur—you craven traitor!'

"And, casting himself upon him, he stamped upon Konrad's spurs, wrenching them from his heels, tore his tunic into shreds with the hook, snatched the long pipe from his hand and struck him across the face with the stem. It all happened in a moment, before anyone could interfere, and the next my father and his unhappy son stood motionless in front of each other. My brother was disfigured, his face was bleeding and distorted, his fine clothes were in ribbons. He never raised a hand to defend himself, but I saw something terrible in his eyes. Then he suddenly cursed him—cursed his own father—in frightful words, and walked away. We have never seen him since."

She broke down sobbing. Kaspar looked askance, vainly seeking for words of consolation. After a while she pursued, clenched her little hand:

"There is scarcely any more to tell. I had in my terror no power to move, and so let my brother go without a word. The servants led my father back into the house, and for hours after this scene he paced the hall, talking to himself. He never heard me when I tried to speak to him, but his eyes, when they fell on me, struck fear into my heart. His fever seemed to grow, instead of abating, as the day wore on. At last he ceased his restless walk and became strangely still. It was dusk already, but I could see his eyes fixed with a kind of smile right in front of him. Then, all of a sudden, he gave a blood-curdling cry, and, raising his maimed arm aloft, dashed himself blindly against the wall. In his frenzy he fancied himself, I imagine, once more hurling his troopers against the French. He fell down, stunned, with his head cut open. For a long time he lay without consciousness, and some of us thought he was dead; but we Prussians are made of strong fibre, we are hard to kill!

"When he was a little better, we moved him here—happily this legacy came at the most opportune moment—hoping much for him of the quiet, the fresh surroundings, and especially of the fact that he never would meet a French cockade in this district. We broke up the old home with its painful associations entirely, not even taking with us a single one of our faithful servants.

"But as my father grew stronger we found that his mania had but taken another turn. Although always melancholy, he was now as gentle, as affectionate as I remember him in the old, old days of our happy childhood, before the national misfortunes which brought on his morose and irascible humours,

and he had lost not only all connected memory of recent events, but also all sense of time.

"The day he was first able to come to the dining-hall once more, he noticed, he who noticed so little, that there was a third seat prepared at our table (it had been laid, as usual, for the surgeon, who, however, had left us that same day). The empty place seemed to distress him strangely, and he looked at me in a troubled, dreamy way.

"'Where is Konrad?' he said, complainingly, at last; 'why did he leave me yesterday, when I was ill?'

"It was the first time I had heard him speak in such a voice, and it brought tears to my eyes. Yesterday! Alas, it was more than a month since I had seen my father almost tearing his son to pieces!

"I answered soothingly—it was the first thing that came to my mind—that Konrad had to return to the University and work. The answer satisfied him, and he was able to eat. But the next day, when we again came to table and he saw this time that preparation was only made for two, he became once more greatly distressed.

"'Where is Konrad's seat?' he cried, quite angrily. 'Is my son not to have his seat in my house?'

"'Konrad will come, dear father,' I said; 'he will come, later.' God forgive me, but I could not bear to see that look on his face.

"'Ah yes, ah yes,' he said, and like a child consoling himself, went on, 'he is a student, but he will come soon.'

"And thus it has been, with but trifling difference, ever since. Day after day the same pitiful scene, till it has become recognised in the household that the

master will not eat his dinner unless this unknown son's place is also laid in front of him; all must be ready for the absent one, and my father watches for him with confident hope, ever disappointed, throughout the livelong day.

"This, sir, is my poor father's madness—a harmless one, as you see. It is for this reason that the postern on the vineyard side is kept open from sunrise to dusk; and it is now known throughout the country round that the lord of Leutsen expects his son, a student from the north."

There was a silence. "Now," concluded Elsa, "you know much of our family history. Distress yourself no more about what has happened. It is just possible that my father may have forgotten all about it already, though, of course, it is difficult to foresee how a mind so afflicted will act at any conjuncture."

She looked at Kaspar with a mournful smile, and he felt that the hour for his departure had struck—felt it with a strange ache at his heart. He had known her but an hour's length, it was true, but his arms had held her, his lips had kissed her; she was very fair and he but one-and-twenty.

He rose, and spoke as bravely as he might, and, bowing, took her hand in his, where unresistingly she let it lie.

"I thank you," he said, "from my soul, gracious lady, for the confidence you have reposed in me, for the goodness wherewith you have forgiven my folly. I shall never forget this day in my life. Would to God I could be of service to you—could in some way lighten your heavy burden! But my very presence

here has brought you fresh trouble ; all I can do now is to go."

He bent to kiss her hand, but the little fingers closed round his with sudden tightness, and he looked up again in hopeful surprise.

"Stay, sir," she cried ; "there is yet something I fain would ask you. Have you not in your wanderings—for I suppose all students wander—come upon some traces of, perchance actually met my brother ?"

"You forget," he said, with a smile he could not restrain, "that, despite my warm reception here, the very name of my entertainers is as yet unknown to me."

Elsa gave a little laugh, then, passing her hand over her forehead as though to brush away for the nonce distressing thought, she straightened her pretty figure, and imitating in subdued mockery the student's ceremonious tones when he had been shamed into declaring his names and qualities :

"I introduce myself," said she. "Elsa, daughter of Major von Leutsen-Auersleben, late of the Brandenburg Hussars. This is Schloss Leutsen, which has come to us, by collateral descent, from the family of that name."

Kaspar started.

"Auersleben !" he cried eagerly ; "and yet it seems impossible. No, I have never met him," he added, in answer to her expectant look. "Nevertheless, the name is familiar to us students ; not," he explained diffidently, "in our Professor's discourses, but in our taverns and fencing-rooms. There is a certain Renommist—as we call such roysterers—oh, a Renommist of the first water ! whose fame has already travelled far and wide. From him we have a new so-called 'Auersleben' beer

ceremonial, also the 'Auersleben Hinter-Haken-Terz,' a cunning sabre throw. He is the king of drinkers, and a reckless duellist. But such a man cannot be your brother."

Elsa mused for some time. At last, with a melancholy shake of the head: "On the contrary," she replied, "it is more than likely that he you speak of is indeed our Konrad."

A low knock at the door broke in upon her words, and there entered the same saucy wench whom Kaspar had met on the uphill road. With a markedly subdued appearance, she announced: "The master desires the gracious lady to come to him on the instant."

Elsa sprang up with a startled countenance.

"The Herr Major is making great preparations for supper in honour of the young master," pursued the handmaid, pointing a dimple at Kaspar and instantly relapsing into great demureness as she curtsayed and withdrew.

"My God!" cried Elsa, clasping her hands in great perplexity. Then hurriedly to Kaspar: "Wait here," she said, almost imploringly; "I must see for myself how this may be." And she flew from the room.

The patter of the little sandals died away in the distance and the young man sat down again, looking around him with a smile. Despite a certain sense of anxiety, almost of guiltiness, he could not help rejoicing at the reprieve. And there he was, still in her maiden sanctuary, of her own free will, instead of tramping forth into the dusty afternoon. She had forgiven him, confided in him, smiled upon him—who could tell what the future still held in store? The poor student's heart swelled with gloriously unformed hopes.

In a little while she came back ; he heard her light step lag in the echoing passages : "Now we must part," he thought again, feeling a great stab of pain.

When she entered, he saw that her face was bathed in tears. She stood looking at him in silence, and for a moment joy overswept his pain, for he thought she wept with a kindred pang to his. But then she spoke :

"What am I to do?" she murmured. "Things are even worse than I anticipated. My father is beside himself with joy, with happiness at your advent—his fancied son's return. I found him directing the preparations for a great feast to celebrate it: all the villagers around, all the servants are to sup in the hall and drink their young master's health in the best of the cellars. I tried to explain, to break it to him ; he turned upon me suddenly, livid with fury, and accused me of wishing to oust his son, my own and only brother, from his proper place. He frightened me ; he looked then as he did when he struck Konrad. To pacify him I said—I know not what. . . Oh, sir, my poor father ! I dare not risk telling him the truth. Will you not have a little pity on him—on me ?"

She clasped her hands beseechingly. "I ! What can I do ?" cried Kaspar, trembling. "Gracious lady, only tell me, that I may obey."

"If you could remain, remain only a few days ; give in to his delusion for a while," she faltered, "only for a little while, till the mood passes away, or till he grows calmer and you can find some excuse to leave. My dear father need never know he has been tricked. Stay, be his son : be my brother, just for a little while."

It seemed to Kaspar as if the heavens opened to him. He fell upon his knees and again kissed her hand.

"You will stay, then?" said Elsa, and wiped her tears away.

* * * * *

The days flew by—short, golden, glamorous, and Kaspar, the Studiosus, the son of the simple Weimar burgess, with no status beyond that hypothetical "nobility of learning" which entitled him to sword-bearing and academic immunities, became for the time being the young lord of the great if stricken house of Leutsen-Auersleben, and, in the eyes of most, second in importance only to the stern master thereof.

It was a simple, regular, almost patriarchal life that they led, this strange trio, in that archaic dwelling: but to the wandering student, smitten to the core by Elsa's sweet eyes, a life brimful of enthralling impressions. He held no count of days past, nor did he dare to reckon how much longer he would be allowed to act brother to his fair young mistress, whilst in his breast quivered a lover's heart.

To the old lord of Leutsen, too, did these days seemingly bring content. A new placidity had come over his anxious face: whereas at first his eyes had at times rested with a sort of painful uncertainty upon his guest, and a heavy sigh had been wont to check his speech as if the disordered mind were now and again uneasily conscious of a wrong it knew not how to right, as days went by, the deferential presence of the youth seemed to lull all doubts. And then it was

as if new life had come to him: with a jealous love, he would scarce allow Kaspar out of his presence. He himself talked but little, never adverted to the past, nor asked more than the simplest question, content to rest his eyes in long, dreamy silence upon the face of his supposed son, happiest of all to watch and listen to the happy intercourse of brother and sister.

In this wise it was easy for Kaspar to act his part; there was no direct deceit to practise, and he had but to follow his own instinct of respect for white locks.

At first Elsa rejoiced in the success of her pious fraud: but presently she began, womanlike, to fret again, and wonder what would happen when the false Konrad had again to leave his father, and whether the delusion would not work greater mischief in the end.

"I fear," she would say to the student.

"Shall I go, then?" he would bravely ask in return.

"God forbid—not yet!" she would cry; "what would become of him, of us, if you did?"

And thus the hour of the terrible decision was ever put off, and days slipped by in the same fantastic situation. After a couple of weeks, however, the awakening came.

There had been new rumours in the household of Castle Leutsen; those relentless, familiar spies, the underlings, had soon elucidated a secret which no very extraordinary precautions were taken to preserve, and among them started scandalous talk which soon spread to the village folks. One had said it was easy to deceive a madman; another surmised the Herr Student seemed an over-devoted brother. The saucy

maiden, who was Elsa's more particular attendant, had a biting lash of the tongue for one who was so engrossed by a sister's charms as to be blind to her own.

This playing, moreover, at brother and sister, between man and maid, so loyal as Kaspar, so pure as Elsa, could not of its own nature continue long. One evening they met each other alone on the terrace walk, and paced for a while together the beaten track, talking in desultory fashion, with their real thoughts far away in the blue, till a languor of sadness overtook them both, and they fell into sympathetic silence. Then leaning, side by side, over the ivy-grown parapet, they lost their gaze in the slowly rising purple darkness of the rocky precipice sheer beneath them, drinking in unconsciously deep of the heady, hot scent of honeysuckle, and of the thousand wild summer herbs which rose through the cooling air. In this wise twilight found and encompassed them.

"And even this, too, must end," murmured Elsa; and as she spoke an unwitting movement brought the round white arm she had rested on the still heated stone against her companion's hand. Instantly the hidden fire within him burst forth uncontrollably; he seized her fingers and covered them with kisses.

For a moment she yielded them to his passion, and then softly drew them back.

"You have," she said with a sigh, "now yourself proved how necessary is your departure. God help me! I will continue alone to face my father's troubles—do the best I can with false explanations; but you must go, Kaspar, and that speedily. I thought, for a time, that I might have found a help in you to bear my heavy task. Oh, I make you no

reproach, dear friend; you have done all that could be done. But such deceit as ours could not prosper. Slanderers are already busy."

She paused, and even in the semi-darkness he saw how her cheek grew hot. "That indeed were little to me," she resumed, "but you yourself have let me fathom the extent of my folly."

"It is true, I love you," said the young man bitterly, "and that is a good reason why I should be dismissed."

There was a long silence, and then his heart smote him, for he saw she was hard set to restrain her tears.

"Forgive me," he said at last, "I am wrong and you are right. It would be base indeed of me to profit of your father's madness, and remain here with all the privileges of a brother now that you know my love. But, Elsa, to leave you thus, without a hope of seeing you again! Oh, I know I am myself mad to aspire to your love! A poor man like me has nought in common with the Lady of Leutsen; all this has been a trick of fate. And yet—I love you, I love you, and I am never to see you again. . . . Have these beautiful days meant nothing after all?"

"Alas!" said Elsa sadly, "I could not bid you hope were you the highest and richest in the land. And, of a truth," and her voice melted to an accent of tender reproach, which well nigh undid all his fortitude, "have I been sister to you so long, yet do you know me so ill to believe that it is for position I care! Ah! you yourself know best why I must bid you forget me. How could I even think of marriage with you whom my father looks upon as his son! And my father is still strong; for many long years he will

be sole arbiter of my destiny. Long years during which you will have time," she strove to speak lightly and to force a smile, "to forget this quaint episode of your life. It will be like a dream, without rational beginning or end. You will write a poem, perchance, on the old Ritterburg and the sister Elsa you found there, and I—I shall live here the reality of your poetry, and die here too, no doubt, unless"

"Unless!" cried the lover with a sudden upspringing of hope.

"Unless my brother were to return to us, to his duty by his father's side," she said; and her clear eyes looked at him steadily through the gloom. "Then indeed might my life be different—but I fear that will never be."

His thought leapt to her meaning.

"It shall be," he cried eagerly. "I will seek your brother; if he be indeed the man whose name I know so well—pray Heaven for it!—I cannot fail to find him in the end. And when I have found him, it will go hard with me if I do not bring him back to you and his father. I will go, Elsa; thanks be to God you did not send me away before this blessed thought came to you. I will go, but I will return. With such a hope before me I cannot fail, shall not fail, unless Death prove too strong for me."

That night was "white" for Kaspar. Up in his stately chamber, Konrad's chamber in the keep overlooking the rocky scarp, the hours dropping slowly from the clock-turret in the yard found him ever at his window, gazing forth, first at the distant light that shone from the North Tower room—that room where

he had known a minute of such glorious life—then, when that went out, watching the darkness till the stars faded; now glowing with triumphant hopes and feverish plans, now faint at heart with the difficulties ahead, and heavy with the coming separation.

Dawn peered betimes into his small world of hopes and fears, and stirred him from futile dreaminess to a bustling thirst for action. A last glance of longing towards the tower lattice window, now tinged with the rose of the rising sun's salutation, and he rapidly packed his scanty baggage, hastily plucked some of the maidenhair fern that had grown unmolested on the window-sill of his hitherto deserted chamber, pressed it in his tablets, and descended to the courtyard.

The place was still sombre and cold under the high surrounding walls; the gates were not yet opened, and Kaspar knocked lustily, fearing that delay might bring failure to his plans, for it was all-important that he who deemed himself his father should not see the false son depart.

Presently the oaken shutters of the gate windows flew back, revealing the unkempt grey head of the old servant who had first greeted him on his entrance in Leutsen.

"Oh, it is you," said the man, with a yawn; "you are early, young sir."

"How do you know whether I am early or late, and what is that to you?" retorted Kaspar, who resented a tinge of familiarity in the servant's voice, and besides willingly seized an outlet for his soreness of spirit at this hard hour. "I have to go out; open the bridge gate at once."

"Oh, I knew you had to go, worthy sir," answered

the other with insolent emphasis, "only I did not think that the passage-bird that had found so comfortable a nest here would wish to take flight in such hurry at the end.—However, since you are in such hurry, you will be pleased to hear, perhaps, that you may have the means of travelling back faster than you came." And, leisurely, he shambled towards the stables, to return presently leading a grey horse, ready saddled.

"My gracious mistress," said he again—"much against my humble advice—ordered that you should be given her old Schimmel, when you left. I must obey. He is yours. And now, sir, mount."

Kaspar swung himself into the saddle, ignoring the servant's ill-humour in the gush of tenderness which this new proof of Elsa's favour awakened within him.

The great gates of the Ritterburg were thrown creaking and sighing back, and as the horse's hoofs rang forth on the baulks of the wooden bridge, the old man's voice came, calling grudgingly after the rider :

"The Lady Elsa ordered me also to give you God-speed. I do ; and may you really send us the true young master."

At the foot of the hill Kaspar halted, to look back for a last time on the house of Leutsen. It stood grey, tipped with gold against the young rising sun, solemn and still, seemingly asleep, for no banner yet waved at the flagstaff head.

Yet on the terrace, just below the North Tower, there moved a small white figure. As Kaspar turned round in the saddle the flutter of a handkerchief, hovering like a dove over the dark parapet, sent a farewell message after him, which he acknowledged

by lustily waving his cap, and bravely pricking onwards.

"And is this the end of an idyll?" asked Kaspar of his heavy heart, when, at a smart trot of the grey, he had fairly started on his pilgrimage, "or merely the beginning of an epic canto?"

* * * * *

A moon had waxed and waned ; upon one Sunday afternoon Kaspar and his grey, both sadly betokening the wear and tear of a prolonged journey, arrived in sight of Wittemberg.

The rider pulled up his steed upon some rising ground, and fell to contemplating the ancient city—an irregular mass of brown pointed roofs—nestling within its green ramparts and darting the slender spires of its churches into a fiery sky.

"Here," thought he, wearily dropping the reins to let the jaded horse stretch his neck towards some tempting tufts by the road-side, "here must the book of dreams be closed should fortune escape me once more. One more failure, and here must Kaspar, now the beggar student, own himself beaten and turn back. Turn back? Ay—where? To his father's house, there to crave from those who have pinched themselves so sorely that he might do great things, for the means of a fresh start in his academical career; to explain his degraded appearance, who left them in such pride of hope; to recount his circuitous journey from one high seat of learning to another; from Leipzig, the mother of our Universities, to caducous Helmstaedt; from Helmstaedt to Halle

the theological; from Halle to Wittemberg! In search of much-needed knowledge? No, dear father, but to trace a notorious ruffler, to appeal to his unknown feelings; to beg the same, on a mysterious plea, to leave forthwith his life of easy glory and return to a home out of which he was once thrashed by a demented parent. A pretty tale to tell, thou fond and foolish lover—and yet no help for thee; fail here once more, and back thou must, ay, and tramp the way afoot, for beggars may not sit on horseback."

Instinctively, while with one hand he affectionately patted the lean neck of his patient companion, with the other Kaspar sought a deplorably flat purse.

"If this Konrad, contrary to the Halle reports," continued he, with a sinking heart, "be not in Wittemberg after all—ay, if this same Konrad take me not from the first for as good as the tale I have to bring him, and befriend me to-day in this strange town (a likely event, by the Muse!), thou, my poor Schimmel, whose once round loins, so bony now, alas, have long carried naught but Elsa's sweet weight, Schimmel, my friend, thou must be sold to some accursed Philistine, else thy poor master starve. *Dum mea bursa vacat* (wert thou a dog, good horse, thou wouldst understand such Latin), *hospes mihi ostia monstrat.*" And in his two open palms the student slapped the purse, between the lean leathern checks of which resided but one, and a small coin.

Yet the thought of Elsa came again to give a fillip to his lagging courage.—Elsa!

"Come, old grey," he said aloud, gently raising the poor brute's head once more, "perhaps we have

reached our goal after all. Come, friend, we may yet find ourselves travelling back, in greater comfort than we have ever known, to our old Ritterburg. There you will live your remnant and die in peace, and I Forward, old grey!"

The dilapidated pair approached the outer walls of ancient Wittemberg at a solemn walk, for the grey's trot, after the last ten days of dire penury, had become only a thing to think back on; and they were objects of mild astonishment to the scattered Sunday strollers that had pushed outside the city gates.

As they drew in sight of the first crumbling, ruinous sallyport, a pig or two ran between the horse's legs, and almost at the same instant there burst upon the afternoon air unmistakable if not inharmonious sounds of revelry.

*"Kommst zu Wittemberg in's Thor
So begegnet dir Schwein, Student oder——"*

muttered Kaspar. "The proverb seems true, in faith; here are the swine, and yonder undoubtedly the students and the rest."

Louder on the wings of the breeze rose presently a rousing chorus of raucous voices sustained by a well-known rhythmic rumbling of pots on wooden board. Kaspar, of course, knew the song well:

*"Tam pro papa quam pro rege
Bibunt omnes sine lege:
Bibit hera, bibit herus,
Bibit miles, bibit clerus,
Bibit ille, bibit illa,
Bibit servus cum ancilla."*

The words in many voices seemed to proceed from behind a screen of verdure to the right, uplifted on tall poles and bearing in eye-flattering combination the scarlet of bean-flowers and the fallow cones of hops.

"*Plus student in calicibus quam in codicibus,*" thought Kaspar, now in vein of proverbial observation, and turned in the direction of the sound. "If my Konrad be in this neighbourhood I must either see or hear of him in this rousing company."

The hymn to bibulousness ceased suddenly, but now, on nearer approach, there was a steady indistinct murmur that might have evoked a suggestion of Sunday preaching, but for intermittent bursts of laughter and a discordant clang, at intervals punctuating a sentence, which Kaspar well knew to be caused by the flat of a sword-blade in contact with the computation table.

He turned the corner of the road, and the scene of the convivial meeting lay before his view. It was no tavern, as he had at first surmised, but the working place of a flourishing cooper—a fact heralded by an artistic device over the tall gateway, giving admittance to a vast covered yard which, on working days, must have offered a stirring sight of activity.

This yard was surrounded partly by walls, partly by high palings, but from his seat in the saddle Kaspar, as he drew close, could easily survey the proceedings within.

In the middle of the court, towering among the crowd of smaller products of the cooper's craft, and scotched up on its side between stout trestles, stood a newly turned-out tun of truly Pantagruelian proportions.

It was from the gaping mouth of this appropriate dwelling that had poured forth the bacchanalian song, and from it were now trickling the emphasised exhortations of some long-winded text-expounder, for the instant undiscernible within its sombre recess.

A beer-cask stood broached at no great distance, between which and the great tun, sundry assistants, running diligently, kept up the necessary supply of liquid.

Excepting these, the yard was empty. Outside the closed gate, a few loafers lingered, smoking their heavy china pipes, and listening with no great sympathy; for, contrary to hypothetical tradition, the student is no favourite among sober University town citizens, but rather a necessary evil in their orderly centre.

Kaspar halted to consider a moment, before advancing further, what he guessed to be some ponderous form of academic jocularly hitherto unknown to him. But almost as soon as his green tunic and his limp cap had become visible over the wall there issued from the tun the sound of a formidable rap of the sword. A significant silence fell suddenly over the potting company, and Kaspar knew that his intrusion had been noticed.

Presently there emerged from the wooden cavern two brothers of the ruffling fraternity, unkempt and long-haired as Alemans of the great Karl's days, and accoutred with more outrageous exaggeration than Kaspar had ever witnessed before. These gentry solemnly, though with some lurking tendency to unsteadiness, drew their portentous rapiers, obtrusively adorned with enormous white and black tassels,

whilst a third, a youth callow and unarmed, holding between his hands a phenomenal tankard, presently appeared and joined them.

The gate of the yard was then thrown open ; without a word the triumvir advanced in procession towards the horseman, and ceremoniously proffered the cup.

"*Aut bibe,*" pronounced one of the swordsmen, in solemn adjuration.

"*Aut abi,*" antiphoned the other ; and they crossed their blades over the horse's head.

Kaspar was athirst, and moreover foresaw in the incident a promise of information. He took the propitiatory draught, and drank it from the saddle.

The last gulp of amber beer, followed by an orthodox jerking down of the lid, was greeted from the tun by a thundering volley of pot thumps. After this libation, the new-comer was conducted into the yard, where he dismounted, the doors were jealously closed behind him, and he was escorted to the mouth of the tun, where he was greeted by a most honorific reception.

A dozen young men, most of them armed with the academic spadron, and each provided with a tall covered glass and an immense pipe, sat on either side of a long board erected on trestles, at the end of which a *præses*, somewhat older than the majority, was enthroned. The latter's face, against the custom of the age, was all but covered by a close and curly dark red beard, doubtless adopted as a form of opposition to a Philistine spirit. There was about him an air of great command, justified by the deference shown him, in the midst of their hilariousness, by the assembled merry-makers.

From the moment (his eyes having grown accus-

toned to the semi-darkness of the tun) Kaspar was able to discern this man's features, he wondered whether he had indeed run his quarry to ground at last. And when the president, after courteously waiting a moment to see the new guest suited with all the requisites for scientific computation, rapped the order for silence, and proceeded with his *ex cathedrâ* exhortations, the wandering Saxon felt almost certain, from all he had heard, that none but Konrad von Auersleben himself could carry out with such a high hand the complicated fooling now in course of progress.

But to question his neighbours then, as, with every sign of that easy amusement appertaining to the early stage of intoxication, they listened in rapt attention to the ponderously humorous improvising of their leader, was a breach of student etiquette too impolitic to be thought about, so he was fain to listen, too, with what patience he could muster.

"In deference," the speaker was saying, in rich unctuous voice, "to the valuable recruit we have just made, I will now retrace one step.

"In these degenerate times it behoves all good Germans to look back on the great example of their ancients. I, as I was saying, during my profound searches through the records of the great national Swilling-art, have brought to light an antique codex, perhaps the most ancient, of our *jus potandi*, and one which goes deeper than our modern, meagre, new-fangled bibulous theories in the important question. This precious table of laws has too long lain buried under the ruins of our old traditions; read, brothers; I repeat, learn and profit."

And he pointed with his sword-pommel to a

sacrilegious parody of the Ten Commandments chalked in broad characters on the bottom, or what in its present position was the end wall, of the tun; an imbecile farrago, revived from the paraphernalia of a certain drunken initiatory ceremonial much appreciated by roystering Burschen in the days of the Thirty Years' War.

"Its philosophy," continued the speaker, complacently mimicking, to the exquisite delight of his disciples, the manner of a well-known Wittembergian professor, "is universal, but esoteric; in other words, its sublime truths are veiled in cryptic language requiring proper elucidation—elucidation, gentlemen, which I alone can offer, be it said to the shame of this age. I will now proceed. The second law, ἡ πίθι ἡ ἀπίθι, in its power of appeal to the most recondite yearnings of the human soul, was, as you witnessed yourselves, illustrated by the philosophical submission, and that *instanter*, of the new brother whose fortune it was to come, at the right hour, in the way of enlightenment.

"To him we shall attend anon. For the present let him hearken whilst I unfold the abstract bearings of the third of these sublime commandments: ἡ ἑδῶ. *Massaquidit: Toppetingue!*"

Kaspar sat and marvelled, partly at the glibness and the imaginative power of the man who could find some fresh form of philosophical parody, each more burlesque than the last, for every fresh stage in the exposition of his table of nonsense; partly also at the extraordinary amusement the inane entertainment seemed to afford the assembled company. Between each allocution a verse of the ancient hymn to universal toping would burst forth from throats ever more

vigorous if less tuneful, and a deep draught be emptied with due ceremony and unanimity.

Kaspar knew this life too well to attempt any resistance to the sacred drinking laws; but as the minutes dragged their weary length along, measured by potation upon potation, he felt himself with dismay—albeit by his late arrival he had escaped many rounds—rapidly falling into giddiness.

When at last, the tenth law having been duly proclaimed, in its accordance everyone became free to follow his own devices, and the conclave began to disperse itself over the yard in various unsteady and hilarious groups, Kaspar, finding himself to his intense relief alone, leant his throbbing head upon his hand, and fell, amid fumes of beer and tobacco that confused his thoughts, to vainly endeavouring to piece his plans together, and decide upon his next move.

An uncomfortable sensation of being watched startled him presently from his abstraction, and looking up, he beheld, standing in front of him, no less a person than the red-bearded *prases* himself, who, with some few of the elder students, seemed to have preserved a marvellously unfuddled head.

After finishing a coolly inquisitive survey of the young man, this dignitary saluted him with semi-courtly, semi-patronising graciousness, and thus addressed him:

“Why, new-found brother, thou seemest strangely meditative. Thou shouldst be gay, proud, exultant, to have become one of the Borussian fraternity. Come, although *de facto* one of ours already, at thy own craving, thou hast still to be formally admitted. We must yet drink ‘brotherhood’ together.”

Somewhat alarmed at the turn affairs seemed to be taking, Kaspar, anxious to dispel the illusion his indiscretion had created, hastened to explain his position.

"Honoured sir," he answered, saluting in return with the utmost academic correctitude, "much as I should feel the honour, my purpose here is not, as you seem to think, to crave admittance to your order, I——"

"How came you here among us?" interrupted the Prussian, with a sudden and threatening change of countenance, drawing himself up arrogantly as he spoke; then his eyes accidentally falling on the Saxon's pouch, "Ah! do I see green among your colours? Sir, what is the meaning of this?" and glaring at his interlocutor. "From your appearance," he pursued, "you are no tyro, and should have known better than to mix with us on false pretences. Your name?"

Kaspar with difficulty repressed the anger roused in his already heated blood by the speaker's overbearing tone, but he had sufficient self-control left to be aware of the danger he stood in. In pacific voice, yet with fitting dignity, he recited his name and credentials. "Being," he added, gently, "by Landsmannschaft a Thüringer, I am, as you know, bound hand and foot in such matters."

"More's the pity," retorted the other with scornful dryness, "for all who consort with us have to wear the black and white."

Again did Kaspar bear down upon his irritation with a hard won prudence.

"I came here, sir," he resumed, "to seek one, a student like you and me, and I would entreat you——"

"Once for all," interrupted the Prussian, turning

upon his heel, and coldly looking over his shoulder at him, "we hold no intercourse with those who will not wear our colours. If your business be urgent you have your remedy. We have little reason to love professed Saxons here." And making a sign to his two coadjutors, who stood awaiting him at a little distance, the Prussian stalked away, clanking his spurs and steel scabbard, and left Kaspar once more free to meditate on the unfavourable turn his affairs were taking.

Emerging from the tun, he retired to a remote corner of the yard, and sitting upon a cask in the shade, resolved to wait till the fresh air should have sobered some of the younger merrymakers, among whom he might reasonably expect more good-nature, and relieved his own heavy head, before attempting to pursue his inquiries. Here he sat, falling again into vague dreaminess, when the sound of impatient neighing struck upon his ear. Glancing around him, he saw that all the students, even the two working assistants, had vanished from sight; but loud guffaws, following upon a prolonged whinny that seemed suddenly to him to have a ring of pain through it, left no doubt as to their close proximity. Like a flash it burst upon him that, since he was now regarded as an interloper, he would, of course, be held a proper butt for that practical joking at which the student is such an adept, and that he had abandoned his poor Schimmel to the tender mercies of his whilom entertainers.

In a few bounds he had rounded the gigantic tun, and was upon the scene of action, just in time to notice one of the students, whose back was turned to him, impatiently snatch a thick brush from the hands

of another, and crying out, "Give, thou art no painter," proceed, with some liquid pitch (a couple of buckets of which, about the yard, had probably suggested the jest) to daub black streaks upon the horse's white flanks.

The poor brute at the sound of his master's approach turned to look at him, and the young man read he knew not what dumb reproach and piteous pleading in the dim eyes of that faithful friend, patient sharer of so many heavy journeys, hard straits, and recurrent disappointments.

Fairly frenzied, more by the stupid cruelty of the trick than by the insult aimed at himself, though that, too, helped to set his young blood a-boiling, Kaspar flung himself into the throng and elbowed his way to the front, furiously calling out as he went :

"Hold, fools ! hold there, you insolent apes !"

The man with the brush faced quickly round, and Kaspar found himself once more confronting the red beard and grey eyes of the *prases*.

"I told you, sir," said the bully, with a sneer that to the Thuringian seemed unbearable, "that those who consort with us must needs wear our colours. When your steed is suitably caparisoned we will further condescend to devote our attention to you. Have but a little patience ; your turn will come presently."

And swirling the brush in the pitch, the speaker, again presenting his broad back to the company, prepared with elaborate ease to resume his task while a loud titter ran through the admiring circle.

But instantly Kaspar was upon him, and with a brief strength born of his rage, seized him fiercely by

the collar and twisted him round again. The attendant titters changed to deep murmurs of disapproval, though at the same time the circle widened as if to leave a fair field for the fray.

But the Prussian was too powerful a man to be dealt with in such manner. And the first surprise of the attack over, he disengaged himself by an irresistible wrench of the shoulders from the younger man's grasp, and slowly stepped back a pace or two. His face had grown ashen white, and his eyes with dilated pupils shone so black as to make him scarcely recognisable.

"My name," he said, after a protracted pause, in a low but clear and measured voice, "is Konrad von Auersleben. I have never yet brooked a slight. As for a blow, sir, it means death to him that gave it."

"Auersleben!" exclaimed Kaspar, suddenly brought back to himself by the actual sound of the word.

"Auersleben," repeated the other with cold emphasis, and proceeded methodically to unclasp his belt, draw his rapier and, with a magnificent air, throw the scabbard behind him. "And now that you have heard my name, be good enough," resting the point of his weapon on his toe, "to get ready—I am waiting."*

* Great changes have taken place since those pre-independence days. Not the least is the present all but complete unity of the German Fatherland; the old enmity between provinces, the true interests of which were identical, is now, indeed, a thing of the past. But few things have changed more, and so much for the better, than the manners and customs of "fighting students." Indeed, it was no doubt the constant recurrence of affrays, such as I now describe, that led ultimately to the establishment of the more decorous and systematic "fight and honour laws," and the general adoption of that comparatively harmless academic weapon, the so-called "Schläger." Wittenberg has now long ceased to rank as a University town.

One of the elder students ceremoniously presented a sword to Kaspar, who pushed it aside with a gesture of horror.

"Konrad von Auersleben," he cried with anguished voice, "I cannot fight you. At least you must listen to me first. I come from your father——"

At the last words Konrad's face became suddenly a mask of fury.

"From my father hast thou come! Then hast thou the more to pay for.—Not fight me, sayest thou swine-hound!" he snarled, making his blade, with two vicious flips, hiss about Kaspar's head. "Not fight me? Must I then slit thine ears to arouse some fighting pluck in thee?"

Seized with cold despair, Kaspar now recklessly prepared to meet his fate.

"I will—I will fight you, Konrad the Renommist," he retorted bitterly, undoing his ragged tunic and snatching the weapon that was a second time proffered, "though my blade, as you no doubt well reckon, is no match for yours. But I fight on one condition," he went on, raising his voice louder as the other impatiently endeavoured to cut him short, "and that is, if I have any breath left in me after this encounter, you shall listen to what I came to tell you."

"Nay," said Conrad, smiling with sinister meaning, "wert thou not already doomed, 'twere a pity thou shouldst make this condition; for, mark me well, I have sworn never to hear either such a messenger as thou professest to be, or him who, thou sayest, sent thee."

As he spoke he fell on guard, engaging the Saxon's awkward blade with masterful vigour. A few seconds

later Kaspar saw a blue flash of steel dart by his face, and at the same instant felt a faint pressure at the end of his own sword. And next happened something that he could not understand.

For a moment his adversary remained stock still, with the arm that had apparently failed in the deadly thrust still extended, as if paralysed; then he slowly dropped it by his side, and pressing his left hand against his breast, stepped back without a word and sat down on the beer cask that stood nearest.

A dead silence had fallen over the astounded assembly. Kaspar, utterly bewildered, remained on guard, until his glance lighted by chance upon the point of his own weapon, to which a couple of crimson drops still adhered to tell their tale. Then, trembling with a horrible fear, he turned to his adversary of a moment ago, and met his eyes—eyes once more grey, no longer glinting with scorn and anger, but fixed on his with an incomprehensible, earnest look—the eyes of the old man at Leutsen!

Doubled up, as if in atrocious pain, but without shifting his gaze, the wounded man once attempted to speak, but seemed unable to part his compressed lips. Two of his companions had drawn close to support him. His face gradually became very red; in a few minutes it grew purple, and the steadfast eyes, still fixed on Kaspar, became hideously bloodshot.

Unmanned by the awfulness of this silent staring, Kaspar broke out incoherently:

"Speak, Konrad—speak, for heaven's sake. Elsa, it was Elsa sent me. I loved her, and came for her sake—and you it was that forced this cursed quarrel on me."

Still there was silence—silence ever more dread. Suddenly one of the spectators, with an eager movement, bent down to peer into his leader's face, and gave a low cry of dismay. And, turning slowly towards the stranger, he said, in a subdued, wondering way :

"Sir, you have killed Konrad von Auersleben, the best swordsman of Studentdom."

Kaspar, stricken dumb in his turn, answered him nothing, but stood staring stupidly at the result of his handiwork—a blind, chance stroke in self-defence, an incomprehensibly mortal wound dealt unwittingly by one who had come as a negotiator of peace and happiness!

Then, blindly, he made for his horse. Two men came forward and helped him, without a word, scrape off and wash in beer the acrid pitch from the animal's flanks. After which he mounted and rode away from Wittemberg.

Here would my father's narrative end. To those who have had patience to follow it so far, and who would feel some curiosity to hear what became of the unlucky student, I will supplement what follows from my own knowledge of the past.

Kaspar rode forth from the accursed town that had seen the failure of all his hopes as if pursued by a thousand furies. Plying spur and whip he urged his horse forward till the poor brute fell dead on the road, and there were many miles between him and Wittemberg; for the old grey had had good blood in his veins, and made a generous spurt in his master's need. After that, utterly destitute, the beggared

student wandered from place to place, subsisting on the charity of peasant folks, intent only on ever drawing further away from Wittemberg.

A liberator from this wretched and aimless situation came at length across his path in the shape of a recruiting agent for the British service. There was a kind of weird consolation in the idea that the old Lord of Leutsen's fictitious son might, after all, fill the place of the slain Otto before their country's foe. Under an assumed name he signed an engagement for foreign service.

It is the patronymic, thus adopted in a moment of despair, which I now bear. And I maintain it with just pride, for (as many well know) there are no few honours attached to it, gathered by my dear father on Iberian and French battlefields during the great war, and also later on, through other walks of life, while serving this grateful English country.

Thus the catastrophe which well nigh blighted all joy in his younger years came to be the starting point of a glorious and otherwise successful career.

As to Elsa, I fain would tell more of her, but all I know is that my father remained faithful to his first avowal of love until late in life. He never saw her again, and, though I cannot imagine in what manner he ever contrived to get news of her, I am convinced that it was not till after her death that he married the beautiful creature who was my mother.

Silhouettes.

THE BARON'S QUARRY.

"OH no, I assure you, you are not boring Mr. Marshfield," protested that personage himself, in his gentle voice, that curious voice that could flow on for hours, promulgating profound and startling theories on every department of human knowledge or conducting paradoxical arguments, without a single inflection or pause of hesitation; "I am, on the contrary, much interested in your hunting talk. To paraphrase a well-worn quotation somewhat widely, *humani nihil a me alienum puto*. Even hunting stories may have their point of biological interest; the philologist sometimes pricks his ear to the jargon of the chase. But, moreover, I am not incapable of appreciating the subject-matter itself. This seems to excite some derision. I admit I am not much of a sportsman to look at, nor indeed by instinct; yet I *have* had some out-of-the-way experience in that line—generally when intent on other pursuits. I doubt, for instance, if even you, Major Travers, notwithstanding your well-known exploits against man and beast, notwithstanding that doubtful smile of yours, could match the strangeness of a certain hunt adventure in which I played an important part."

The speaker's small, deep-set, black eyes, which never warmed to anything more "human" than a purely speculative scientific interest in his surroundings, here wandered round the sceptical, yet expectant circle with bland amusement. He stretched out his

bloodless fingers for another of his host's superfine cigars, and proceeded, with only such interruptions as were occasioned by the lighting and careful smoking of the latter :

“ I was returning home after a prolonged stay in St. Petersburg, intending to linger on my way and test with mine own ears certain among the many dialects of eastern Europe (anent which there is a symmetrical little cluster of philological knotty points it is my modest intention one day to unravel ; however, that is neither here nor there). On the road from Ukraine to Hungary I bethought myself opportunely of proving the once pressingly offered hospitality of the Baron Kossowski.

“ You may have met the man, Major Travers ; *he* was a tremendous sportsman, if you like. I first came across him at McNeil's place in remote Ireland. Now, being in Bukowina, within measurable distance of his Carpathian abode, and curious to see a Polish lord at home, I remembered his invitation. It was already of long standing, but it had been warm, born in fact of a sudden fit of enthusiasm,” here a half mocking smile quivered an instant under the speaker's black moustache, “ which, as it was characteristic, I may as well tell you about.

“ It was on the day of, or rather, to be accurate, on the day after my arrival, towards the small hours of the morning, in the smoking-room at Rathdrum, our host was peacefully snoring over his empty pipe and his seventh glass of whisky, also empty. The rest of the men had slunk off to bed. The Baron, who, all unknown to himself, had been a subject of most interesting observation to me the whole evening, being

now practically alone with me, condescended to turn an eye as wide awake as a fox's, albeit slightly blood-shot, upon the contemptible white-faced person who had preferred spending the raw hours over his papers, within the radius of a glorious fire's warmth, to creeping silyly over treacherous quagmires in the pursuit of timid bog creatures (snipe shooting had been the order of the day)—the Baron, I say, became aware of my existence, and entered into conversation with me.

“He would no doubt have been much surprised could he have known that he was already mapped out, craniologically and physiognomically, catalogued with care, and neatly laid by in his proper ethnological box, in my private type museum; that, as I had sat and examined him from my different coigns of vantage in library, dining and smoking rooms, that evening, not a look of his, not a gesture went forth, but had had significance for me.

“You (I had thought), with your broad shoulders and deep chest; your massive head that should have gone with a tall stature, not with those short, sturdy limbs; with your thick red hair, that should have been black, as, for that matter, should your wide-set yellow eyes—you would be a real puzzle to one who did not recognise in you equal mixtures of the fair, stalwart and muscular Slav with the bilious-sanguine, thick set, wiry Turanian. Your pedigree would no doubt bear me out; there is as much of the Magyar as of the Pole in your anatomy. Athlete, and yet a tangle of nerves; a ferocious brute at bottom, I dare say, for your broad forehead inclines to flatness; under your bristling beard your jaw must

protrude, and the base of your skull is enormously thick. And, with all that, capable of ideal transports; when that girl played and sang to-night I saw the swelling of your eyelid veins, and how that small, tenacious, claw-like hand of yours twitched. You would be a fine leader of men, but God help the wretches in your power!

“So had I mused upon him. Yet I confess, that when we came into close contact with each other, even I was not proof against the singular courtesy of his manner and his unaccountable personal charm.

“Our conversation soon grew interesting, to me as a matter of course, and evidently to him also. A few general words led to interchange of remarks upon the country we were both visitors in, and so to national characteristics—Pole and Irishman, be it remarked, have not a few in common, both in their nature and history. An observation which he made—not without a certain flash in his light eyes and a transient uncovering of the teeth—on the Irish type of female beauty, suddenly suggested to me a stanza of an ancient Polish ballad, very full of milk and blood imagery, of alternating ferocity and voluptuousness. This I quoted to the astounded foreigner *in the vernacular*, and this it was that metamorphosed his mere perfection of civility into sudden warmth, and, in fact, procured me the invitation in question.

“When I left Rathdrum the Baron's last words to me were that if I ever thought of visiting his country otherwise than in books he held me bound to make Yany, his Galician seat, my headquarters of study.

“Therefore from Czernowicz, where I stopped, I wrote, received in due time a few lines of prettily-

worded reply, and ultimately entered my sled in the nearest town to, yet at a most forbidding distance from, Yany, and started upon my journey thither.

“The undertaking meant many long hours of undulation and skidding over the November snow to the somniferous bell jangle of my dirty little horses; the only impression of interest being a weird gipsy concert I came in for at a miserable drinking booth half buried in the snow where we halted for the refreshment of man and beast. Here, I remember, I discovered a very definite connection between the characteristic run of the tsimbol, the peculiar bite of the Zigeuner's bow on his fiddle string and some distinctive points of Turanian tongues; your Spanish gipsy speaks differently on his instrument. But oddly enough when I later attempted to put this observation on paper I could find no word to express it.”

A few of our company evinced signs of sleepiness, but most of us who knew Marshfield, and that he could, unless he had something novel to say, be as silent and retiring as he now evinced signs of being copious, awaited further with patience. He has his own deliberate way of speaking, which he evidently enjoys greatly, though it be occasionally trying to his listeners.

“On the afternoon of my second day's drive, the snow, which had till then fallen fine and continuous, ceased, and my Jehu, suddenly interrupting himself in the midst of some exciting wolf story quite in keeping with the time of year and the wild surroundings, pointed to a distant spot against the grey sky to the

north-west, between two wood-covered folds of ground, the first eastern spurs of the great Carpathian chain.

“ ‘There is Yany,’ said he.

“ I looked at my far-off goal with interest. As we drew nearer, the sinking sun, just dipping behind the hills, tinged the now distinct frontage with a cold copperlike gleam, but it was only for a minute; the next the building became nothing more to the eye than a black irregular silhouette against the crimson sky.

“ Before we entered the steep avenue of poplars the early winter darkness was upon us, rendered all the more depressing by grey mists which gave a ghostly aspect to such objects as the sheen of the snow rendered visible. Once or twice there were feeble flashes of light looming in iridescent halos as we passed little clusters of cottages, but for which I should have been induced to fancy that the great Hof stood alone in the wilderness, such was the deathly stillness around. But even as the tall, square building rose before us above the vapour, yellow lighted in various storeys, and mighty in height and breadth, there broke upon my ear a deep-mouthed, menacing bay, which gave at once almost alarming reality to the eerie surroundings.

“ ‘His lordship’s boar and wolf hounds,’ quoth my charioteer calmly, unmindful of the hideous concert of barks and howls which ensued as he skilfully turned his horses through the narrow gateway and flogged the tired beasts into a sort of shambling canter that we might land with glory before the house door—a weakness common, I believe, to drivers of all nations.

“ I alighted in the court of honour, and while

awaiting an answer to my tug at the bell, stood, broken with fatigue, depressed, chilled and aching, questioning the wisdom of my proceedings and the amount of comfort, physical and moral, that was likely to await me in a *tête-à-tête* visit with a well-mannered savage in his own home.

“The unkempt tribe of stable retainers who began to gather round me and my rough vehicle in the gloom, with their evil-smelling sheepskins and their resigned, battered visages, were not calculated to reassure me. Yet when the door opened there stood a smart chasseur, and a solemn majordomo, who might but just have stepped out of Mayfair, and there was displayed a spreading vista of warm deep-coloured halls with here a statue and there a stuffed bear, and, under-foot, pile carpets strewn with rarest skins.

“Marvelling, yet comforted withal, I followed the solemn butler, who received me with the deference due to an expected guest, and expressed the master's regret for his enforced absence till dinner-time. I traversed vast rooms, each more sumptuous than the last, feeling the strangeness of the contrast between the outer desolation and this sybaritic excess of luxury grow ever more strongly upon me; caught a glimpse of a picture gallery where peculiar yet admirably-executed latter-day French pictures hung side by side with ferocious boar hunts of Snyders and such kin; and at length was ushered into a most cheerful room, modern to excess in its comfortable promise, where, in addition to the tall stove necessary for warmth, there burned on an open hearth a vastly pleasant fire of resinous logs, and where, on a low table, awaited me a dainty service of fragrant Russian tea.

“My impression of utter novelty seemed somehow enhanced by this unexpected refinement in the heart of the solitudes and in such a rugged shell, and yet, when I came to reflect, it was only characteristic of my cosmopolitan host. But another surprise was in store for me.

“When I had recovered bodily rest and mental equilibrium in my downy armchair before the roaring logs, and during the delicious absorption of my second glass of tea, I turned my attention to the French valet, evidently the Baron's own man, then deftly unpacking my portmanteau, who, unless my practised eye deceived me, asked for nothing better than to entertain me with agreeable conversation the while.

“‘Your master is out, then,’ quoth I, knowing that the most trivial remark would suffice to start him.

“True, Monseigneur was out; he was desolated, in despair (this with the national amiable and imaginative instinct), but it was doubtless important business. M. le Baron had the visit of his factor during the midday meal; had left the table hurriedly, and had not been seen since. Madame la Baronne had been a little suffering, but she would receive Monsieur.

“‘Madame . . . !’ exclaimed I, astounded. ‘Is your master then married? since when?’—visions of a fair Tartar, fit mate for my Baron, immediately springing somewhat alluringly before my mental vision. But the answer dispelled the pleasing fancy.

“‘Oh yes,’ said the man, with a somewhat peculiar expression. ‘Yes, Monseigneur is married. Did Monsieur not know? And yet it was from England that Monseigneur brought back his wife.’

“‘An Englishwoman!’

“My first thought was one of pity—an English-woman alone in this wilderness, two days’ drive from even a railway station, . . . and at the mercy of Kosowski! But the next minute I reversed my judgment. Probably she adored her rufous lord, took his veneer of courtesy—a veneer of the most exquisite polish I grant you, but perilously thin—for the very perfection of chivalry; or perchance it was his inner savageness itself that charmed her; the most refined women often amaze one by the fascination which the preponderance of the brute in the opposite sex seems to have for them. I was anxious to hear more.

“‘Is it not dull for the lady here at this time of year?’

“The valet raised his shoulders with a gesture of despair that was almost passionate.

“‘Dull! Ah, Monsieur could not conceive to himself the dulness of it. That poor Madame la Baronne! not even a little child to keep her company on the long, long days when there was nothing but snow in the heaven and on the earth, and the howling of the wind and the dogs to cheer her. At the beginning, indeed, it had been different; when the master first brought home his bride the house was gay enough. It was all re-decorated and re-furnished to receive her (Monsieur should have seen it before — a mere *rendezvous de chasse*, for the matter of that so are all the country houses in these parts). Ah! that was the good time! There were visits month after month, parties, sleighing, dancing, trips to St. Petersburg and to Vienna; but this year it seemed that they were to have nothing but boars and wolves—how Madame could stand it—well, it was not

for him to speak . . . ' And heaving a deep sigh he delicately inserted my white tie round my collar, and with a flourish twisted it into an irreproachable bow beneath my chin.

"I did not think it right to cross-examine the willing talker any further, especially as, despite his asseveration, there were evidently volumes he still wished to pour forth, but I confess that as I made my way slowly out of my room along the noiseless length of passage, I was conscious of an unwonted, not to say vulgar, curiosity concerning the woman who had captivated such a man as the Baron Kossowski.

"In a fit of speculative abstraction I must have taken the wrong turning, for I presently found myself in a long and narrow passage I did not remember. I was retracing my steps when there came the sound of rapid footfalls upon stone flags; a little door flew open in the wall close to me, and a small, thick-set man, huddled in the rough skeepskin of the Galician peasant, with a mangy fur cap on his head, nearly ran headlong into my arms. I was about condescendingly to interpellate him in my best Polish, when I caught the gleam of an angry yellow eye and noted the bristle of a red beard—Kossowski!

"Amazed, I fell back a step in silence; with a growl like an uncouth animal disturbed he drew his filthy cap over his brow with a savage gesture, and pursued his way down the corridor at a sort of wild-boar trot.

"This first meeting between host and guest was so odd, so incongruous, that it afforded me plenty of food for a fresh line of conjecture as I traced my way back to the picture gallery, and from thence success-

fully to the drawing-room, which, as the door was ajar, I could not this time mistake.

“It was large and lofty and dimly lit by shaded lamps. Through the rosy gloom I could at first only just make out a slender figure by the hearth, but as I advanced this was resolved into a singularly graceful woman in a clinging fur-trimmed velvet gown, who, with one hand resting on the high mantelpiece, the other hanging listlessly by her side, stood gazing down at the crumbling wood fire as if in a dream.

“My friends are kind enough to say I have a cat-like tread; I know not how that may be, at any rate the carpet I was walking upon was thick enough to smother a heavier footfall; not until I was quite close to her did my hostess become aware of my presence. Then she started violently and looked over her shoulder at me with dilating eyes. Evidently a nervous creature; I saw the pulse in her throat, strained by her attitude, flutter like a terrified bird.

“The next instant she had stretched out her hand with sweet English words of welcome, and the face, which I had been comparing in my mind to that of Guido's Cenci, became transformed by the arch and exquisite smile of a Greuse. For more than two years I had had no intercourse with any of my nationality. I could conceive the sound of his native tongue under such circumstances moving a man in a curious, unexpected fashion.

“I babbled some commonplace reply, after which there was silence while we stood opposite each other, she looking at me expectantly. At length, with a sigh checked by a smile and an overtone of sadness in a voice that yet tried to be sprightly :

“‘Am I then so changed, Mr. Marshfield?’ she asked. And all at once I knew her—the girl whose nightingale voice had redeemed the desolation of the evenings at Rathdrum, whose sunny beauty had seemed—even to my celebrated cold-blooded æstheticism—worthy to haunt a man’s dreams. Yes, there was the subtle curve of waist, the warm line of throat, the dainty foot, the slender tip-tilted fingers—witty fingers, as I had classified them—which I now shook like a true Briton, instead of availing myself of the privilege the country gave me, and kissing her slender wrist.

“But she *was* changed, and I told her so with unconventional frankness, studying her closely as I spoke.

“‘I am afraid,’ I said, gravely, ‘that this place does not agree with you.’

“She flushed to the roots of her red-brown hair. Then she answered, coldly, that I was wrong, that she was in excellent health, but that she could not expect, any more than other people, to preserve perennial youth (I rapidly calculated she might be two-and-twenty), though, indeed, with a little forced laugh, it was scarcely flattering to hear one had altered out of all recognition. Then without allowing me time to reply, she plunged into a general topic of conversation which, as I should have been obtuse indeed not to take the hint, I did my best to keep up.

“But while she talked of Vienna and Warsaw, of her distant neighbours and last year’s visitors, it was evident that her mind was elsewhere, her eye wandered, she lost the thread of her discourse, answered me at random, and smiled her piteous smile incongruously. However lonely she might be in her soli-

tary splendour, the company of a countryman was evidently no such welcome diversion.

“After a little while she seemed to feel, herself, that she was lacking in cordiality, and, bringing her absent gaze to bear upon me with a puzzled, strained look :

“‘I fear you will find it very dull,’ she said, ‘my husband is so wrapped up this winter in his country life and his sport; you are the first visitor we have had. There is nothing but guns and horses here, and you do not care for these things.’

“The door creaked behind us, and the Baron entered, in faultless evening dress. Before she turned towards him I was sharp enough to catch again the upleaping of a quick dread in her eyes—not even so much dread, perhaps, I thought afterwards, as horror, the horror we notice in some animals at the nearing of a beast of prey. It was gone in a second, and she was smiling; but it was a revelation.

“Perhaps he beat her in Russian fashion, and she, as an Englishwoman, was narrow-minded enough to resent this, or perhaps merely I had the misfortune to arrive during a matrimonial misunderstanding.

“The Baron would not give me leisure to reflect, he was so very effusive in his greeting—not a hint of our previous meeting—unlike my hostess, all in all to me, eager to listen, to reply, almost affectionate, full of references to old times and genial allusions. No doubt when he chose he could be the most charming of men; there were moments when, looking at him, in his correct attire, hearkening to his cultured voice, marking his quiet smile and restrained gesture, the almost exaggerated politeness of his manner to his

wife, whose fingers he had kissed with pretty, old-fashioned gallantry upon his entrance, I asked myself could that encounter in the passage have been a dream? could that savage in the sheepskin be my courteous entertainer?

“‘Just as I came in, did I hear my wife say there was nothing for you to do in this place?’ he said presently to me. Then turning to her:

“‘You do not seem to know Mr. Marshfield. Wherever he can open his eyes, there is for him something to see which might not interest other men. He will find things in my library, for instance, which I have no notion of. He will discover objects for scientific observation in all the members of my household, not only in the good-looking maids, though he could tell their points as I could those of a horse. We have maidens here of several distinct races, Marshfield; we have also witches, and Jew leeches, and holy daft people. In any case, Yany, with all its dependencies, material, male and female, are at your disposal, for what you can make out of them.’

“‘It is good,’ he went on gaily, ‘that you should happen to have this happy disposition, for I fear that, no later than to-morrow, I may have to absent myself from home. I have heard that there are more news of wolves—they menace to be a greater pest than usual this winter—but I am going to drive them on quite a new plan, and it will go hard with me if I don’t exterminate them. Well for you, by the way, Marshfield, that you did not come within their scent to-day.’ Then, musingly: ‘I should not give much for the life of a traveller who happened to wander in these parts just now——’ Here he interrupted him-

self hastily, and went over to his wife, who had sunk back on her chair, livid, seemingly on the point of swooning.

“His gaze was devouring; so might a man look at the woman he adored in his anxiety.

“‘What—faint, Violet—alarmed?’ His voice was subdued, yet there was an unmistakable thrill of emotion in it.

“‘Pshaw!’ thought I to myself, ‘the man is a model husband.’

“She elenched her hands, and, by sheer force of will, seemed to pull herself together. These nervous women have often an unexpected fund of strength.

“‘Come, that is well,’ said the Baron, with a flickering smile, ‘Mr. Marshfield will think you but badly acclimatised to Poland if a little wolf scare can upset you. My dear wife is so soft-hearted,’ he went on to me, ‘that she is capable of making herself quite ill over the sad fate that might have, but has not, overcome you. Or, perhaps,’ he added, in a still gentler voice, ‘her fear is that I may expose myself to danger for the public weal.’

“She turned her head away, but I saw her set her teeth as if to choke a sob. The Baron chuckled in his throat and seemed to luxuriate in the pleasant thought.

“At this moment folding-doors were thrown open and supper was announced. I offered my arm, she rose and took it in silence. This silence she maintained during the first part of the meal, despite her husband’s brilliant conversation and almost uproarious spirits. But by-and-by a bright colour mounted to her cheeks and lustre to her eyes. I

suppose you will all think me horribly unpoetical if I add that she drank several glasses of champagne one after the other, a fact which, perhaps, may account for the change.

“At any rate she spoke and laughed and looked lovely, and I did not wonder that the Baron could hardly keep his eyes off her. But, whether it was her wifely anxiety or not, it was evident her mind was not at ease through it all, and I fancied that her brightness was feverish, her merriment slightly hysterical.

“After supper—an exquisite one it was—we adjourned together, in foreign fashion, to the drawing-room; the Baron threw himself into a chair, and, somewhat with the air of a pacha, demanded music. He was flushed; the veins of his forehead were swollen and stood out like cords. The wine drunk at the table was potent—even through my phlegmatic frame it ran hotly.

“She hesitated a moment or two, then docilely sat down to the piano. That she could sing I have already made clear; how she could sing, with what pathos, passion, as well as perfect art, I had never so fully realised before.

“When the song was ended she remained for a while, with eyes lost in distance, very still, save for her quick breathing. It was clear she was moved by the music; indeed, she must have thrown her whole soul into it.

“At first we, the audience, paid her the rare compliment of silence. Then the Baron broke forth into loud applause.

““Brava, brava! that was really said *con amore*. A delicious love song—delicious—but French! You

must sing one of our Slav melodies for Marshfield before you allow us to go and smoke.'

"She started from her reverie with a flush, and after a pause struck slowly a few simple chords, then began one of those strangely sweet, yet intensely pathetic Russian airs, which give one a curious revelation of the profound endless melancholy lurking in the national mind.

"'What do you think of it?' asked the Baron of me when it had ceased.

"'What I have always thought of such music—it is that of a hopeless people—poetical, crushed, and resigned.'

"He gave a loud laugh. 'Hear the analyst, the psychologue! Why, man, it is a love song! Is it possible that we, uncivilised, are truer realists than our hyperecultured Western neighbours; have we gone to the root of the matter, in our simple way?'

"The Baroness got up abruptly. She looked white and spent; there were bistre circles round her eyes.

"'I am tired,' she said, with dry lips; 'you will excuse me, Mr. Marshfield, I must really go to bed.'

"'Go to bed, go to bed,' cried her husband, gaily. Then, quoting in Russian from the song she had just sung, 'Sleep my little soft, white dove, my little innocent, tender lamb!'

"She hurried from the room. The Baron laughed again, and, taking me familiarly by the arm, led me to his own set of apartments for the promised smoke. He ensconced me in an armchair, placed cigars of every description and a Turkish pipe ready to my hand and a little table on which stood cut glass flasks and beakers in tempting array.

“After I had selected my cigar with some precautions, I glanced at him over a careless remark, and was startled to see a sudden alteration in his whole look and attitude.

“‘You will forgive me, Marshfield,’ he said, as he caught my eye, speaking with spasmodic politeness. ‘It is more than probable that I shall have to set out upon this chase I spoke of to-night, and I must now go and change my clothes that I may be ready to start at any moment ; this is the hour when it is most likely these hell-beasts are to be got at. . . . You have all you want, I hope,’ interrupting an outbreak of ferocity by an effort after his former courtesy.

“It was curious to watch the man of the world struggling with the primitive man.

“‘But, Baron,’ said I, ‘I do not at all see the fun of sticking at home like this. You know my passion for witnessing everything new, strange, and outlandish. You will surely not refuse me such an opportunity for observation as a midnight wolf-raid. I will do my best not to be in the way if you will take me with you.’

“At first it seemed as if he had some difficulty in realising the drift of my words, he was so engrossed by some inner thought, but as I repeated them he gave vent to a loud cachinnation.

“‘By Heaven, I like your spirit!’ he exclaimed, clapping me strongly on the shoulder. ‘Of course you shall come. You shall,’ he repeated, ‘and I promise you a sight, a hunt such as you never heard or dreamt of; you will be able to tell them in England the sort of thing we can do here in that line. Such wolves are rare quarry,’ he added, looking slyly at me, ‘and I have a new plan for getting at them.’

“There was a long pause, and then there rose in the stillness the unearthly howlings of the Baron's hounds, a cheerful sound which only their owner's somewhat loud converse of the evening had kept from becoming excessively obtrusive.

“‘Hark at them . . . the beauties!’ cried he, showing his short, strong teeth, pointed like a dog's, in a wide grin of anticipative delight. ‘They have been kept on pretty short commons, poor things. They are hungry. By the way, Marshfield, you can sit tight on a horse, I trust? If you were to roll off, you know, these splendid fellows they would chop you up in a second; they would chop you up,’ he repeated unctuously ‘snap, crunch, gobble, and there would be an end of you!’

“‘If I could not ride a decent horse without being thrown,’ I retorted, a little stung by his manner, ‘after my recent three months’ torture with the Guard Cossacks, I should indeed be a hopeless subject. Do not think of frightening me from the exploit but say, frankly, if my company would be displeasing.’

“‘Tut!’ he said, waving his hand impatiently. ‘It is your affair. I have warned you. Go and get ready if you want to come. Time presses.’

“I was determined to be of the fray; my blood was up. I have hinted that the Baron's Tokay had stirred it.

“I went to my room and hurriedly donned clothes more suitable for rough night work. My last care was to slip into my pockets a brace of double-barrelled pistols which formed part of my travelling kit.

“When I returned I found the Baron already booted and spurred; this without metaphor. He

was stretched full length on the divan, and did not speak as I came in, nor even look at me. Chewing an unlit cigar, with eyes fixed on the ceiling, he was evidently following some absorbing train of ideas.

“The silence was profound ; much time went by ; it grew oppressive ; at length, wearied out, I fell, over my chibouque, into a doze, filled with puzzling visions, out of which I was awakened with a start. My companion had sprung up, very lightly, to his feet ; in his throat was an odd, half-suppressed cry, gruesome to hear. He stood on tiptoe, his eyes fixed, as though looking through the wall, and I distinctly saw his ears point in the intensity of his listening.

“After a moment, with hasty, noiseless energy, and without the slightest ceremony, he blew the lamps out, drew back the heavy curtains, and threw the tall window wide open.

“A rush of icy air, and the bright rays of the moon—gibbous, I remember, in her third quarter—filled the room. Outside, the mist had condensed, and the view was unrestricted over the white plains at the foot of the hill.

“The Baron stood motionless in the open window, callous to the cold in which, after a minute, I could hardly keep my teeth from chattering, his head bent forward, still listening. I listened too, with ‘all my ears,’ but could not catch a sound ; indeed, the silence over the great expanse of snow might have been called awful ; even the dogs were mute.

“Presently, far, far away, came the faint tinkle of bells—so faint, at first, that I thought it was but fancy, and then distincter. It was even more eerie than the silence, I thought, though I knew it could

come but from some passing sleigh. All at once that ceased, and again my duller senses could perceive nothing, though I saw by my host's craning neck that he was more on the alert than ever. But at last I, too, heard once more, as it were, the tread of horses muffled by the snow, and unaccompanied by any jangling of bells, intermittent and dull, yet drawing nearer. And then in the inner silence of the great house it seemed to me I caught the noise of closing doors. But here the hounds, as if suddenly becoming alive to some disturbance, raised the same fearsome concert of yells and barks with which they had greeted my arrival, and listening became useless.

"I had risen to my feet. My host turning from the window seized my shoulder with a fierce grip and bade me hold my noise; for a second or two I stood motionless under his iron talons, then he released me with an exultant whisper:

"'Now for our chase!' and made for the door with a spring. Hastily gulping down a mouthful of arak from one of the bottles on the table I followed him, and, guided by the sound of his footsteps before me, groped my way through passages black as Erebus.

"After a time, which seemed a long one, a small door was flung open in front, and I saw Kossowski glide into the moonlit courtyard and cross the square. When I, too, came out he was disappearing into the gaping darkness of the open door of the stables; and there I overtook him.

"A man who seemed to have been sleeping in a corner jumped up at our entrance and led out a horse ready saddled. In obedience to a gruff order

from his master, as the latter mounted, he then brought forward another which he had evidently thought to ride himself, and held the stirrup for me.

“We came delicately forth, and the Cossack hurriedly barred the great door behind us. I caught a glimpse of his worn scarred face by the moonlight as he peeped after us for a second before shutting himself in—it was stricken with terror.

“The Baron trotted briskly towards the kennels, from whence there was now issuing a truly infernal clangour, and, as my steed followed suit of its own accord, I could see how he proceeded dexterously to unbolt the gates without dismounting, while the beasts within dashed themselves against them and tore the ground in their fury of impatience.

“He smiled as he swung back the barriers at last, and his ‘beauties’ came forth. Seven or eight monstrous brutes, hounds of a kind unknown to me: fulvous and sleek of coat, tall on their legs, square-headed, long-tailed, deep-chested, with terrible jaws slobbering with eagerness. They leaped around and up at us, much to our horses’ distaste. Kossowski, still smiling, lashed at them unsparingly with his hunting-whip, and they responded, not with yells of pain, but with snarls of fury.

“Managing his restless steed and his cruel whip with consummate ease, my host drove his unruly crew before him, out of the precincts, then halted and bent down from his saddle to examine some slight prints in the snow which led, not the way I had come, but towards what seemed another avenue. In a second or two the hounds were gathered round this spot, their great snake-like tails quivering, nose

to earth, yelping with excitement. I had some ado to manage my horse, and my eyesight was far from being as keen as the Baron's, but I had then no doubt he had come already upon wolf tracks, and I shuddered mentally, thinking of the sleigh bells.

"Suddenly, Kossowski raised himself from his precarious position; under his low fur cap his face looked scarcely human in the white light; and then we broke into a hand-canter just as the hounds dashed, in a compact body, along the trail.

"But we had not gone more than a few hundred yards before they began to falter, then straggled, stopped and ran back and about with dismal cries. It was clear to me they had lost the scent. My companion reined in his horse, and mine, luckily a well-trained brute, halted of itself.

"We had reached a bend in a broad avenue of firs and larches, and just where we stood, and where the hounds ever returned and met nose to nose in frantic conclave, the snow was trampled and soiled and, a little further on, planed in a great sweep as if by a turning sleigh. Beyond was a double-furrowed track of skates and regular hoof-prints leading far away.

"Before I had time to reflect upon the bearing of this unexpected interruption Kossowski, as if suddenly possessed by a devil, fell upon the hounds with his whip, flogging them upon the new track, uttering the while the most savage cries I have ever heard issue from human throat. The disappointed beasts were nothing loth to seize upon another trail; after a second of hesitation they had understood and were off upon it at a tearing pace, and we after them at the best speed of our horses,

“Some unfounded idea that we were going to escort or rescue benighted travellers flickered dimly in my mind as I galloped through the night air; but when I managed to approach my companion and called out to him for explanation, he only turned half round and grinned at me.

“Before us lay now the white plain, scintillating under the high moon’s rays. That light is deceptive; I could be sure of nothing upon the wide expanse but of the dark, leaping figures of the hounds already spread out in a straggling line, some right ahead, others only just in front of us. In a short time, also, the icy wind, cutting my face mercilessly as we increased our pace, well nigh blinded my eyes with tears of cold.

“I can hardly realise how long this pursuit after an unknown prey lasted; I can only remember that I was getting rather faint with fatigue, and ignominiously held on to my pommel, when all of a sudden the black outline of a sleigh merged into sight in front of us.

“I rubbed my smarting eyes with my benumbed hand; we were gaining upon it second by second; two of those hell-hounds of the Baron’s were already within a few leaps of it.

“Soon I was able to make out two figures, one standing up and urging the horses on with whip and voice; the other clinging to the back seat, and looking towards us in an attitude of terror. A great fear crept into my half-frozen brain—were we not bringing deadly danger, instead of help to these travellers? Great God! did the Baron mean to use them as a bait for his new method of wolf hunting?

“I would have turned upon Kossowski with a cry of expostulation or warning, but he, urging on his

hounds as he galloped on their flank, howling and gesticulating like a veritable Hun, passed me like a flash. And all at once I knew."

Marshfield paused for a moment and sent his pale smile round upon his listeners, who now showed no signs of sleepiness; he knocked the ash from his cigar, twisted the latter round in his mouth and added, drily:

"And I confess it seemed to me a little strong, even for a Baron in the Carpathians. The travellers were our quarry! But the reason why the Lord of Yany had turned man-hunter I was yet to learn—just then I had to direct my energies to frustrating his plans. I used my spurs mercilessly. Whilst I drew up even with him, I saw the two figures in the sleigh change places: he who had hitherto driven now sat back. There was the pale blue sheen of a revolver barrel under the moonlight, followed by a yellow flash, and the nearest hound rolled over in the snow.

"With an oath the Baron twisted round in his saddle to urge on the remainder. My horse had taken fright at the report, and dashed irresistibly forward, bringing me at once almost level with the fugitives, and the next instant the revolver was turned menacingly towards me. There was no time to explain; my pistol was already drawn, and as another of the brutes bounded up, almost under my horse's feet, I loosed it upon him—I must have let off both barrels at once, for the weapon flew out of my hand; but the hound's back was broken. I presume the traveller understood; at any rate he did not fire at me!

"In moments of intense excitement like these, strangely enough the mind is extraordinarily open

to impressions. I shall never forget that man's countenance, in the sledge, as he stood upright and defied us in his mortal danger; it was young, very handsome, the features not distorted, but set into a sort of desperate, stony calm, and I knew it, beyond all doubt, for the face of an Englishman. And then I saw his companion: it was the Baron's wife. And I understood why the bells had been removed.

"It takes a long time to say all this; it only required an instant to see it. The loud explosion of my pistol had hardly ceased to ring before the Baron, with a fearful imprecation, was upon me. First he lashed at me with his whip as we tore along side by side, and then I saw him wind the reins round his off arm, and bend over, and I felt his angry fingers close on my right foot. The next instant I should have been thrown out of my saddle; but there came another shot from the sledge. The Baron's horse plunged and stumbled, and the Baron himself, hanging on to my foot with a fierce grip, was wrenched from his seat. His horse, however, was up again immediately, and I was released, and then I caught a confused glimpse of the frightened and wounded animal plunging and drawing wildly away to the right, leaving a black track of blood behind him in the snow; his master, entangled in the reins, running with incredible swiftness by his side and endeavouring to vault back into the saddle.

"And now came to pass a thing which, in his savage plans, my host had doubtless never anticipated.

"One of the hounds that had during this short check recovered lost ground, coming across this hot trail of blood, turned away from his course, and with a

joyous yell darted after the running man. In another instant the rest of the pack was upon the new scent.

“As soon as I could stop my horse I tried to turn him in the direction the hounds had taken, but just then, through the night air, over the receding sound of the horse's scamper and the sobbing of the pack in full cry, there came a long scream and, after that, a sickening silence. And I knew that somewhere yonder, under the beautiful moonlight, the Baron Kossowski was being devoured by his starving dogs.

“I looked round, with the sweat on my face, vaguely, for some human being to share the horror of the moment and I saw, gliding away, far away, and silently in the white distance, the black silhouette of the sledge.”

“Well” said we, in divers tones of impatience, curiosity, or horror, according to our divers temperaments, as the speaker uncrossed his legs and gazed at us in mild triumph, with all the air of having said his say, and satisfactorily proved his point.

“Well,” repeated he, “what more do you want to know? It will interest you but slightly, I am sure, to hear how I found my way back to the Hof, or how I told as much as I deemed prudent of the evening's gruesome work to the Baron's servants, who, by the way, to my amazement, displayed the profoundest and most unmistakable sorrow at the tidings, and sallied forth (at their head the Cossack who had seen us depart) to seek for his remains. Excuse the unpleasantness of the remark: I fear the dogs must have left very little of him, he had dieted them so carefully. However, since it was to have been a case of ‘chop, crunch, and gobble,’ as the Baron had it, I

preferred that that particular fate should have overtaken him than me—or, for that matter, either of those two country people of ours in the sledge. Nor am I going to inflict upon you,” continued Marshfield, after moistening his clay, “a full account of the impressions I received when I found myself once more in that immense, deserted, and stricken house so luxuriously prepared for the mistress who had fled from it, how I philosophised over all this, according to my way, the conjectures I made as to the first acts of the drama, as to the untold sufferings my countrywoman must have endured from the moment her husband grew jealous till she determined on this desperate step, as to how and when she had met her lover, how they communicated and how the Baron had discovered the intended flitting in time to concoct his characteristic revenge.

“One thing you may be sure of—I had no mind to remain at Yany an hour longer than necessary, and even contrived to get well clear of the neighbourhood before the lady’s absence was discovered. Luckily for me, or I might have been taxed with connivance; though indeed the simple household did not seem to know what suspicion was, and accepted my account with childlike credence, very typical and very convenient to me at the same time.”

“But how do you know,” said someone, “that he was her lover—he might have been her brother, her——”

“That,” said Marshfield, interrupting with his little flat laugh, “I happen to have ascertained—and, curiously enough, only a few weeks ago.

“It was at the play; between the acts; from my comfortable seat (first row of the pit). I was looking

leisurely round the house when I caught sight of a woman, in a box close by, whose head was turned from me, and who presented the somewhat unusual spectacle of a young neck and shoulders of the most exquisite contour and perfectly grey hair; and not dull grey but rather of a pleasing tint—like frosted silver. This aroused my curiosity, I brought my glasses to a focus on her, and waited patiently till she turned round. Then I recognised the Baroness Kossowski, and I no longer wondered at the young hair being white.

“She looked placid and happy; strangely so, it seemed to me, under the sudden reviving in my memory of such scenes as I have now described. But presently I understood further; beside her, in close attendance, was the man of the sledge—a handsome fellow with much of a military air about him.

“During the course of the evening, as I watched, I saw a friend of mine come into the box, and at the end I slipped out into the passage to catch him as he came out.

“‘Who is the woman with the white hair?’ I asked. Then, in the fragmentary style approved of by ultra-fashionable young men (this earnest languid mode of speech presents curious similarities in all languages) he told me: most charming couple in London—awfully pretty, wasn’t she? He had been in the Guards—*attaché* at Vienna once, he believed—they adored each other. White hair, devilish queer, wasn’t it? Suited her, somehow. And then she had been married to a Russian, or something, somewhere in the wilds and their names were. . . . But do you know,” said Marshfield, interrupting himself, “I think I had better let you find that out for yourselves—if you care.”

THE "SON OF CHAOS."

DURING the early summer months I was in Paris, miserably depressed both in mind and body. The cause of this unhappy mood concerns in no way this account; but for very many days before the particular morning when I saw the things I now wish to relate I had tasted no sleep.

It was, I believe, the 10th of June. I had risen at dawn from my bed of unrest, in utter despair of ever knowing again the balm of oblivion, and had set forth to tramp the deserted streets before the day's great heat.

Obsession-dogged wanderings in time brought me to that quarter, on the left bank of the river, where, in haughty silent retirement from the gay heart of the city, looms the Paris Observatory above granite paved roads and poverty-stricken lanes.

In those unknown and depressing purlieus I roamed, wearily fighting the protean apparitions of my misery, losing my way ever more, and longing for something to distract at least my eyes among the dusty surroundings. Presently, as I gazed about me to seek the same, I became aware of the approach of another early rambler in the dreary avenue I tramped. It was the only living creature I had met, save some melancholy public guardians and a few four-footed prowling wretches; and I made a languid effort to become interested. I studiously noted that the fellow was tall of figure, and gaunt; that he walked with outstretched steps, but pensively, his head

bent on his breast; and I calculated that, although his direction seemed unsettled, his irregular path might cross mine in a moment or two. But he suddenly diverged towards the nettle-grown heaps of some unoccupied ground (*terrains vagues*, such plots are expressively termed there), fallow since many years, to judge by the rankness of the vegetation it nurtured.

The next instant, like a flash, I thought I recognised, under the deambulist's negligent attire, the loose long frame and the unmistakable auburn mane of one I knew well of old—Rob Brodie—a whilom college chum.

I halted, and called out in English. He was at that moment bending, apparently to grub at the root of some broad-leaved weeds, and sprang up again, rigid, to his full height, examining me under his palm.

"Meldrum! by all that is odd!" he exclaimed, after a moment, adding, as he advanced in three immense strides, "and by all that is welcome! But where from," he went on, shaking my hand heartily, "and what make you here, at such an hour?" (The last of six strokes was vibrating away from the Pantheon hill.)

"Trying to cure insomnia," I answered, reservedly, dreading explanations.

He looked at me keenly, but kindly, for two seconds, and my heart warmed towards our old friendship.

"Yes. You are not as happy as I remember you," he said, simply, and, forbearing further inquiry, bent over once more, like a stork, to examine the mould, which he stirred with a knife. Having apparently found what he sought, he heaped some of the black

earth on a spread handkerchief, which he tied up at the corners.

"But you?" I asked; "why such an early bird?"

He looked up, and in a broad smile showed his white teeth, splendid under his orange moustache.

"A good trope," he cried, merrily; "the right one, too, as usual with you. I am, in fact, 'catching the worm.'"

"For fishing to-day?" I suggested.

"No, my dear Meldrum," he returned, rising and towering over me afresh. "No; have you ever known me waste my time in such wise?" Then, quite gravely, but with that odd blinking in his eyes I remembered of old as premonitory of some astounding statement, "I am selecting light and likely food for my Son of Chaos," he explained.

I must have looked the interrogation I felt unequal to formulate, for, after fixing me in an abstracted manner, he pursued of his own accord—

"I *will* tell you all about this, though it may be premature. It may," he repeated, thoughtfully. "But no; the victory is as good as won, and you shall be my first witness."

Then, with a sudden warmth, he took my arm and marched me away by his side.

"You, Meldrum, old friend," said he, after a pause, "were one of the few who ever believed in my so-called subversive assertions. Ah! I could wish we had here to-day one or two of our sceptics! But it little matters now; they shall hear of it, all in time."

He lapsed suddenly into silence. With his head again bent on his breast, smilingly looking through the earth, as it were, and still absently retaining his

strong grip of my arm, he walked along rapidly, and quite unconscious of the absurd fact that I had to hop at least three steps to his two.

In this manner I was trotted into a narrow, silent bye-street of small whitewashed houses. The place was so out of the way of all traffic, that, I recollect, green blades and fruiting moss could live undisturbed between the paving pebbles.

I had then time to examine my friendly captor more closely. He had grown thinner than ever, and his grey eyes were deeper sunk than I remembered them. Under his unconventional Parisian attire he had retained, I was dimly glad to notice, a certain British neatness of person and linen which seemed to preclude the idea of poverty.

We halted in front of a humble-looking, one-storeyed building, withal very neat, and, with its narrow door, looking pleasantly private. Over the low roof, red-tiled like a country house, could be seen the projecting boughs of tolerably well-grown trees.

"By the way," said Brodie, at length breaking his silence, after he had pulled the bell, and as a rapid patter of feet was heard approaching from within, "you do not know, I suppose, I am married? There she comes."

Some months before I might, perhaps, have pitied him, mentally, and with lofty bachelor cynicism; but in my then frame of mind the one thing that occurred was the sadness—sadness ever present, but here under yet another form—that no one would ever, now, thus hasten to welcome James Meldrum home.

Violent astonishment, however, as soon as the door was drawn back, drove away on the spot the

haunting burden of my thoughts. I looked up at Brodie in bewilderment.

"My wife," said he, in the most natural manner possible, and with hospitable gesture motioned me in.

I looked down again on the little body—a Japanese!—the prettiest specimen I had ever seen; indeed, very pretty, as a second glance discovered beyond doubt; but, with her side-tilted eyes, her blue-black hair, profuse and stiff, her small row of teeth gleaming, black as polished jet, behind her queer little geranium-red mouth, quite the most unmistakably outlandish wife to a Scot that, I should imagine, was yet known.

She approached her giant lord with caressing ways, and took hat and parcel from his hands, casting occasional curious glances on me.

He said two words; these, I surmise, must have meant, "A friend, dear," for she immediately turned and attended to me in the same cosy style.

At the end of the passage, through an open back door, lay a piece of garden-land, brilliantly verdant, both above and under foot, in the sunshine that already beat the earth fiercely from a cloudless heaven. Brodie looked wistfully in that direction.

"She will give you breakfast," he said, after a moment's hesitation, beginning to move away as if irresistibly attracted thither; "she will see to you. You are at home, you know."

The little woman, who was dressed, no doubt for indoor purposes only, in her native silks, smiled a confident baby smile at me, and led the way to a ground-floor room, large and cool, and one of the most peculiar dens conceivable.

It was quite bare in the middle, but for a table and two small chairs. On the other hand, the walls, from the red-tiled floor to the beamed ceiling, absolutely disappeared under an astounding motley of chattels, spread on broad rough shelves. Books there were, of course, in great numbers, but piled up with absolute disregard of the conventional methods of marshalling those friends. Besides these, philosophical instruments, most of them of shapes and for purposes unknown, phials and glass jars containing gruesome anatomical preparations, bundles of dried plants and stuffed animals, a collection of odd-looking musical instruments, eastern statuettes of Buddhistic physiognomy, and a thousand odds and ends of kinds utterly meaningless to me, filled up every nook that was suitable as to space.

In contrast with this medley stood, at the lighter end of the room, a tidily-appointed analytical bench, on which I recognised the microscope and the balance of modern straight sailing science.

Brodie's wife waited patiently till my astonished eye again rested upon her.

"Breakfast?" then lisped the incredible little Jap in pretty, broken English. "What? Tea, yes? Bread, fruit, yes?" and on my assent left me seated and pondering in the middle of my friend's Capernaum.

I am not of those who write down a man mad, as it were a matter of course, because he does not frame his mind (being otherwise well gifted) after the average intellectual pattern of his social peers. And, therefore, concerning Brodie, although I am bound to admit that I have always heard him quoted an

obvious lunatic, I have always reserved my opinion. I am fain to do so still, even with the recollection on me of the last day I spent in his company. Whether, on that occasion, he was only under a delusion typical of the dangers attendant on too finite knowledge, or whether he really succeeded in bringing to issue an experiment calculated to upset the most venerable of our cosmogonic tenets, I am not, either by training or intellect, competent to decide. If he have sufficiently recovered from the effects of the same to publish his own version of an extraordinary discovery, we may certainly expect some stir in that section of the scientific world which gropes through biological researches. My narrative is addressed to readers lay and otherwise unprejudiced like myself.

To refer once more to Brodie's repute for extreme eccentricity, I may state that, although he was an ardent devourer of books, and always vastly enthused about a chosen subject for a time, he never at any time adhered long to any particular course of study. I believe he never even graduated at any of the numerous universities whither he flitted from time to time. But all this, to my mind, is no damaging proof against his mental equilibrium. My opinion would, of course, be different had he been dependent for welfare on sustained exertions. But if a young man, singularly gifted for the accumulation of knowledge, and drawn by his tastes towards cryptic speculation, be satisfied with a modest settled income, I can but envy his philosophical happiness.

I first knew Brodie in Glasgow, the sombre dank college halls of which we both helped to warm with our red undergraduates' gowns. That was in the old

days, when that seat of learning still dwelt in the heart of the city slums ; when the aspiring belfry and the neo-gothic lecture rooms on Hillhead existed yet not even in their designer's imagination. I was fascinated from the first by his odd physiognomy, his immense height and absurd thinness, his phenomenally red hair ; by the owl-like appearance of his nose, high-bridged, but rather small, between enormously wide open grey eyes, which he would characteristically close when reflecting, and open of a sudden with a fantastically profound expression. This attraction at first sight ripened soon into admiring friendship under successive revelations of original personality—for, with such an extraordinary presence, there was something curiously taking in the fellow's utter lack of self-consciousness.

The queerness of Brodie's outer man was well balanced by an irresistibly paradoxical turn of mind, a deep-set bias which ever led him to select an utterly novel line in the cross-country of reasoning. Even then, in those good—now, alack, far-off—days of our young twenties, he was always in full pursuit of some magnificent conceptions, objects of distant wonder for me.

I know I am something of a dullard, and fear I was considered as such by many of our set among whom Rob's elevated notions were a standing subject of jest. But there can be no doubt that *he* more than held his own in that circle of brilliant young scholarly wits, or of very positive scientists (as they acknowledged themselves to be) that met weekly at our *noctes* in his rooms ; for Brodie was the best to do among us, and hospitable in proportion. Many a

time, at those Saturday symposia, when twitted about the fad of the moment, have I heard him, quietly, between a sip at his toddy and a puff at his yard of clay, propound a prodigious speculative conundrum in terse, direct manner, which invariably and *instantly* nonplussed even his superiors in standing and knowledge.

He left Glasgow one fine morning quite suddenly. He was disgusted, said he, with the humdrum courses of our professors. But some years later I again met him, still a mere student, in Leyden. He was as pleasant and simple as ever, but seemed (only in a temporary freak, I trust) to have relinquished, as "unsatisfactory," the religion he was born in. I believe he inclined then to Buddhism; at any rate, I found him full of feeling on the topic of Dhammapada. As for science, he followed the world-renowned medical lectures at that seat of learning, but with a dreary, critical kind of interest; all his enthusiasm was now, it seemed, centred in Basil Valentine, Paracelsus, and thinkers of similar mould.

After that I lost sight of him altogether, though I heard that, having indulged in a spell at Bologna, he had been seen making his way, as it was supposed, to Japan. And from what I had just seen the rumour was likely to have been true. It struck me as on the whole not incongruous that I should meet him at length, as happy as ever—as ever in the midst of a scientific wild-goose chase, and mated to a quaint little Buddhist.

Presently this same small heathen returned softly to the room, and busied herself laying a cloth on the table, and thereon the morning refection. Then

very quietly she went out, to return bearing in her arms an infant with beady-black eyes and stiff rust-coloured hair, with which she retired to a distant corner.

Soon after, Rob himself came in, with a radiant look on his face, as if he would have immense things to tell after he had sacrificed a little more to the rites of hospitality.

I remember he poured some pale, amber-coloured liquid into my cup.

"Japanese tea," he said, and excused himself on having no Chinese to give me. There was besides a fishy conserve he called *katse-busse*, which I was advised to eat, moistened with olive oil on bread; also oranges and other fruit.

And between the influence of these novel tastes (pleasant, I am bound to admit) and the hypnotic effect produced on me by the monotonous balancing movement of Brodie's wife—who, in her corner, suckled her babe conspicuously, and in perfect innocence, at a very white bosom—a dreamy state stole over me which, in the midst of my bodily fatigue, was curiously grateful.

I heard much voluble talk from my entertainer, but followed it with little attention. He explained to me the story of his life and schemes, how and why he had chosen such a companion, such an abode; and I dimly thought: "If you have found happiness on your way, what need to explain why you clutched at it?" And with latent but soft bitterness I wondered whether there could be a more beautiful sight in a man's eyes than that of his mate—be she but a small savage from distant isles—bending her head with that

world-old, ever-new grace, to gaze tenderly on the child that is his own. . . .

And through such thoughts Brodie continued his exposition, unconscious, in his own eagerness, of my day-dreaming.

"All these experiments, and their classified results," he said at last, touching me lightly on the arm in a way that made me start, "are embodied in this little MS."—there was a fat pocket-book in his hand—"but the last, almost concluded, will eclipse them all."

He paused an instant, fondly looking into futurity. "How those very men, who scoffed so lightly at my everlasting objections, will bite their lips when they hear of it, to be sure!" he added, pensively.

I made an effort to seem interested, and half turned to look inquiringly at the working table by the window.

"No, not there," he cried. "It is in the garden, out in the free air, under the blue sky, under the glorious sun-pour. My tank of light is the crucible—Isis, Sol, the pivot of our system, the universal creator, the unremitting life-giver, my furnace; water, the ubiquitous menstruum, the blood that courses this world's body (but water in the chaotic condition), my Osiris, the matrix for this transmutation of inert matter into living. *Chaotic condition, and waiting for ordered forms*, Meldrum—there is the whole secret. And they, the lofty science men who ever talk of the "modern," the "experimental," method for the elucidation of Nature's laws, and yet never do experiment except in their holes and corners, and who rest content with ratiocinating on possibilities——"

Here Brodie, who had by degrees waxed passionately emphatic, suddenly abruptly checked himself. After a moment's silence he added, with impressive simplicity—

"I have made the experiment, that is all." Then recollecting himself still further—

"But you eat no more," he remarked, in friendly solicitude. "You will now smoke, no doubt; nothing like smoke for a man in your condition. What shall it be? I have cutties and clays of home production; but this French herb is real sorry stuff. Better try also some of our Japanese tobacco. I myself now smoke no other."

In obedience to an imperative though not unkind word, the little matron swung her puppet over her shoulder, and came forward to wait on us with small reed-stemmed, metal-bowled pipes. Two of these she carefully filled with fine-cut, fawn-coloured weed, and lighted for us from a spill.

"Nothing like smoking for one in your condition," repeated Brodie, blowing down a double cloud himself from his nostrils. "Bless me, but you do not look your old self at all, man. Oh! I know—I know," he went on, as though deprecating an explanation which I had, in truth, no mind to give. "I have been so myself," and he blinked his grey eyes sagely; what he meant I could not understand but it mattered little. "Put your feet up and be comfortable," he went on, dragging his own chair forward for my use, and sitting down on a corner of the table where he towered over me.

I made myself as easy as I might on two hard chairs, and puffed at the odd-flavoured pipe. After

looking down upon me for a time with profound introspective gaze, he presently reverted to his theme.

"The old priests, over there," pursued he, significantly pointing eastwards with his thumb over his shoulder, "who so furiously forbade me certain experiments under threat of complicated tortures, they it was that gave me this idea—unwittingly, no doubt. They are some thousands of years behind us, we say. Maybe. Or shall we have it, so many thousands of years nearer to unbiassed reasoning? Ah! I always thought, myself, there *was* something in their esoteric tenets which might well put some of our great men nearer the scent. With these latter, sometimes, like a rift in a black cloud—Old Darwin himself, now . . . well, never mind, *you* would not understand; but the great man came burningly close, I promise you, to a new germ of ideas in one of his 'fool's experiments' (as he apologetically called them, afraid of Philistine judgment and lacking the pluck to pursue). Fool's experiments! Bah! It was his transcendental genius that once—alas! only once—urged him to break through the shackles of conventional science. You may have heard how he tried the effect of a bassoon's searching music on a germinating cotyledon? No? Of course you have not; it is not your subject. But to come back to mine—it was, as I said, the prohibition of those old devils, by the Sacred Mountain yonder, that gave me the idea I am now carrying out. A revelation, Meldrum! Like a flash of lightning, I saw the reason why, in the unscientific days of old, the priest class anathematised the very idea of an incantation. So I packed at once, you see. It was not so much the fear of being 'boned alive' that

made me run, but the frenzy to see this out. Their distress was so obvious that I knew for sure there must be even more than I surmised at first in what I suggested; there were arcana capable of being brought to light, and on the lines I then tentatively followed. So we flitted, and ultimately, on various considerations, elected to take our perch here. *She left with me, not only because we loved,*" he half turned round to cast a thoughtful look at the woman, who, with head bent and again rapt in maternal contemplation, was very softly humming to the babe what sounded like the intermittent drone of a bumble-bee round a flower, "but also," continued Brodie, "because she knows the suitable music."

He brought back his wide-open gaze, which now began really to fascinate me, upon my face.

"I do not claim to be a genius myself," he resumed, with serious modesty; "I only claim *common sense*: your man of genius invariably lacks equilibrium. He can deduct, or induct, never can or dares to do both at the same stretch. He can prove to you that all our so-called elements only differ really in the swing of their atom vibration, and yet he will blindly deny the possibility of transmutation and rejuvenescence. I ask you, is it logical? Having unravelled so much of Nature's tangle, he dares maintain that the *nisus formativus* of life itself is not within man's ken, and terrified, harks back to the old saw—*omne vivum ex ovo*—and there the matter is to rest, forsooth! No one dares consider the question of the *first vivum*, eh?—the vivum out of chaos! Now, those untrammelled minds of old alchemists, astrologers, call them what you will, though they *did*

grope in the dark (through lack of the experimental means we now at last possess) for such things as 'the stone' and the 'life elixir,' were actually nearer the broad truths of this material world. But they, too, were afraid of the powers, and hid their discovered truths under their hocus-pocus jargon. Yet we will have to go back—but, man, why do you stare at me like that; are ye ailing?"

Here Brodie, interrupting himself, bent slowly forward to look more closely at me. I believe now that I never understood a single word of all he said at the time, though it has since come back to me; but that I sat there, open-mouthed, staring upwards at him with palsied eyelids.

"No," I managed with an effort to say, "only tired, as you know."

"Why, I declare you *are* asleep, and with your eyes open," he went on, bending lower till his grey orbs seemed to grow so enormous as to fill the room. "Maybe I weary you, old man. I shall leave you alone to rest. You are at home—so I said before. I have my work. When you care to, you will find me in the yard."

And I was left in silence. I remained, mistily cogitating. It must have been sleep, as he said, for I certainly *woke* up later, and that in a heart-freezing anguish, with the blood hissing through my ears and every individual joint aching in distressing vibration.

All this (I have thought since) was, of course, the result of sinking into exhausted torpor, in a cramped and choking position on two small chairs. But at the time it seemed as though every fibre of flesh was quivering, and my blood spurting under the pulse of

some throbbing *outer* roar. And in fact the room was filled with a deep sound, the like of which I had never heard.

This presently died away, to be, however, immediately followed by the most impish music conceivable—a perfect charivari it fell on my still unsettled wits; an undulating caterwaul, with now and then a grating, shivering, sistrum-like clangour that set tooth and nail furious.

Poised on tiptoe in my first startled attitude I listened, vaguely thinking of Macabre's uncanny Rebec. Then, again, the cacophony subsided, merging into sounds not inharmonious although devoid of conventionally musical sense, and I was able to breathe again, to sink once more on my heels, and to realise that all this strangeness proceeded from the garden through the open, flower-screened window. But in a very short time, however, there mixed itself with the music, which had grown luring, almost caressing, an increasing chorus of unmistakable bird voices, and after a while the whistles, twitters, chirrups became deafening. It seemed as though all the feathered clans had gathered from Parisian trees and housetops into Brodie's secluded garden, and like an excitable human mob, vociferated, quarrelled, and applauded until the mysterious fiddle notes were drowned under the clamour.

Fairly maddened this time, I rushed out, rudely pushed the inner door, and found myself in a little orchard. It was enclosed, on one side by the house itself, on the others by high stone walls; utterly uncultivated but with a neglected wealth of wild vegetation, and carpeted with grass ankle-deep.

On my irruption, most of the birds—for the place was, as I had surmised, full of them—flew up like a swarm, and took their perch in the neighbourhood, darkening eaves and wall-crest and higher boughs, where they kept up their excited concert.

I then noticed Brodie and his wife; she held in her hands a tall monochord instrument; he was armed with what seemed a double-bass fiddlestick. His countenance was illuminated.

"Come, Meldrum," he cried, in a loud exultant voice, "see for yourself; come and watch my palin-*genesis* crucible."

I advanced through the wild weeds, and there before me stood what at first flush seemed a large self-luminous sphere, a phenomenal pearl, poised in space. This resolved itself, however, into a crystal bowl with wide trumpet-shaped mouth, filled with opalescent liquid, through which rapidly ascended and disappeared a constant flow of iridescent bubbles. The surface of the water was dotted with small floating islands of a moss-like substance, emerald-hued, with here and there blood-red specks. This, to me incomprehensible, machine was supported on what seemed a bronze pillar from which ran into the house, snake-like in and out of the grass, a sort of twisted brown cable.

"Here," said Brodie, gazing upon it with fond, expectant eyes, and raising his voice to make it audible above the piping din, whilst his wife gravely went on with her weird performance; "here is my crucible, heated, as you see, by pure ethereal sun-rays, which permeate and vivify the innermost free molecules it contains. These life-rays are concentrated on

it, dive and work into it, not only from the free heaven above, but on every side: from this system of mirrors;" and as he spoke and I approached still nearer, I had noticed, with further bewilderment, various glasses, set up in what—as Brodie explained—is called cata-dioptic system. To me they glowed, at the time, like so many basilisk eyes, peering from grass, and leaves, and stone fissures, and their effect was distracting.

"Furthermore," Brodie pursued, "not one of the molecules in the matrix (and it contains all the elements—not so many, after all—of the living clay) swings in there, but is free to change as it lists under new impulses; for I keep them in that necessary primordial chaotic state, with this pile," jerking his head in the direction of the cable; "they are perpetually decomposing and reuniting, and so ready to be rearranged in sympathy with what their master lists. Now they are harmonising with the concert you hear. Have you never felt even yourself, high organism as you are, changed to your innermost fibre, from placid to tender, or fierce, by a few musical vibrations? But I have no time now; you see that they are rearranging themselves, and not blindly, not inertly—there must be, there *is* something living there; not only that moss, those confervæ; they live, 'tis true, but that is not enough. There must be life with movement and feeling; life sentient of pain and pleasure—we shall see!"

He stopped, pushed me aside, and motioning to his wife to desist, applied his bow to the edge of the basin. There rose again on the ear, slowly, but ever waxing in strength, the mighty gong-like roar that

had awakened me a short time ago in such innermost-felt anguish. The water rose into geometrical forms, and its inner light broke into shimmering prismatic colours; its surface leaped up into changing ridged designs, and at last burst upwards into showers of scintillating droplets.

And now the little Japanese began again on her rebec, and one by one, as the roar subsided, and her music was heard, the birds came back to the call till the trees and the ground were black with them; some even impudently perching on the lips of the uncanny bowl.

Scarcely believing my senses, I stood and watched Brodie, who, pale and fierce with expectation, peered into the milky liquid. Suddenly I saw the sweat burst upon his forehead. A shadow, a sort of cloud, became visible in the middle of the bowl. Presently amidst the ever-developing pandemonium of bird whistles and hisses round us, this shadow began to move; it seemed to grow compact, then more rapidly it flitted to and fro, and once or twice passed near to the glass sides.

Brodie gave a stifled cry, and, as if losing all self-control, plunged his hand into the bowl. After a frantic search, the hand reappeared, holding some horrible object which struggled in uncouth and flabby agony. I cannot describe it otherwise than as a jelly-fish-like creature, yet to some extent bird-shaped; a molluscous monster, possessed of rudimentary, useless limbs, legs, and wings, as of some callow fowl, translucent and viscid.

A very storm of nausea seized me as soon as I had fully seen the Thing. But on Brodie himself the

impression was one I cannot recall without revulsion. There *may* have been a moment of triumph, but what I saw in his face was what I have only seen in the most fearful dreams of fever. He remained a moment, open-mouthed, fascinated by the object he held at arm's length, babbling faintly between quick breaths :

"It's living—living—living."

Then, as the thing curled what seemed to be its head round, the horror of it appeared at one wave, to overreach him, and he gave a choking cry :

"Mercy—it has *eyes* ! It looks at me, faugh !" and shrieking, with a wild gesture of loathing, he attempted to throw the creature from him. But the viscous abomination clung to his fingers ; and his hair rose on his head.

Through the high pitch of the birds that now gave forth their clamour with incomprehensible fury, his groans, betrayed by tremulous lips, were inaudible. But at last with a howl of despair, he succeeded in tearing the clammy creature from his hand, and throwing it upon the earth.

For an instant only I could see this grizzly gosling, this unspeakable liquid fowl, writhe and seemingly attempt to crawl back as if for protection towards its creator ; but the clean birds of the air would have none of it. In their numbers they clustered round the beast, angrily fell to work with claws and beak, and the next minute, of Brodie's *vivum out of chaos*, there was no trace left.

The deed done, the birds rose simultaneously, and with a great whirr and hurtling of wings fluttered away into the sunny air. Silence reigned once more

in the green well. I looked at Rob. He stood leaning against a tree, trembling and staring stupidly at his hand. His little wife, with her fiddle at her feet, gazed up at the discomposed face of her master with sorrowful eyes that presently filled with quiet welling tears.

And here the abject, unexplainable fear encompassing this man who had, or thought to have, made life out of matter, suddenly in the oppressive stillness infected me also, body and soul, with panic.

As one tries to escape from the unutterable, all-shadowing anguish of nightmare, without a word, and no doubt unnoticed, I turned and flew from the house and ran through endless tangles of street, away, away, till at last, exhausted and bathed in grimy sweat, but somewhat relieved of my incubus, I found myself once more in familiar surroundings.

I tried the following day, being myself again, and stung by remorse for having thus deserted an old friend in his distress, to find my way back to his retired abode. But my search was vain. And now nothing but another accidental meeting, or a communication from him to some science periodical, can, I fear, put me in the way of learning the further fortunes of Brodie's cosmogonic experiments.

Temptations,

A NEW SENSATION.

I.

“FANCY possessing two such houses as the Palazzo Borgognone and the Villa Castelcapaccio! I do not know which I envy you the most—I almost think it is this little paradise.”

“As you say, the villa is charming, the air salubrious, the gardens a dream, and the situation all that could be desired. The apartments, too, which I have reserved for myself in the Palace, will no doubt prove convenient.”

“Spoilt child of fortune, your tone-belies your words!”

“Do you know me so little as to expect enthusiasm of me? If ever I did possess a capacity for that fatiguing emotion, I am glad to say it exists no longer.”

“And you can tell me that in front of one of the most beautiful views in Rome!”

The Duchess rose from her seat with a short laugh, and, walking over to the window, looked coldly forth.

“The beauties of nature,” she answered, “never did appeal to me very strongly. In so far as I dislike ugly things, I like a fine prospect; but beyond that . . .”

She completed the sentence by a slight shrug of her shoulders, and passed onwards towards the end of the room, where she remained for a few moments

stationary before a long Empire mirror contemplating her own lovely image with the same pleasureless countenance.

The Baronne du Châtelet watched her friend keenly through her eyeglass, her little dark plain face alive with interest and curiosity.

“What is the matter with you?” she asked. “It is not grief for the dear departed, surely?”

The Duchessa Castelpaccio turned round and looked at the questioner with a slow smile of such peculiar import that the latter burst out laughing:

“Well no, I did not really make the suggestion seriously. You have reached the pearl-grey period in your mourning, I see; I have no doubt your feelings have arrived at the same soothing stage. That is as it should be, after eighteen months.”

“Castelpaccio was an estimable man,” remarked his widow, gravely.

“Of course, of course!”

“He was the most perfect gentleman I ever knew. At the very point where he was becoming a little too decrepit to be quite pleasant company, he had the good taste to retire.”

“You can flatter yourself on your luck, my dear,” observed the Baronne feelingly; “those things do not happen to everybody, and to be a penniless beauty, of family so old, so proud, that anything in all Austria under blood-royal would have been considered a *mésalliance*, while a marriage out of your own rank was not to be thought of, is not as a rule a promising prospect. When we were girls together at Vienna, I remember how you used to say you would cheerfully sell your looks for my money, because to have

one's face for one's fortune did not pay, in this century; and yet I had to content myself with an *attaché de légation*—a Belgian, my dear, of all men!—and only *conseiller* now, notwithstanding all my efforts. Whereas you! Reflect one moment on your good fortune! To meet at the age of twenty with a childless widowed duke of fabulous wealth, descended from the ancient kings of Rome, who is possessed of everything that is delightful in the way of palaces and jewels, who adds to his merits the one of falling really in love with you, and who, to make up for the trifling drawback of being some fifty years your elder, has the delicacy to withdraw from existence within reasonable time. Thus at twenty-five, rich, beautiful free as air, and everywhere sought after, I assure you, my dear, if you were not my best friend, I should hate you!”

“My good Marie, I shall confide to you a little secret—I am bored.”

“With your money, your face,” cried her companion, in a shrill crescendo, “with that tea-gown! It's sinful.”

The Duchess swept her pale draperies back across the room, and sank once more into the arm-chair she had vacated.

“I am bored,” she repeated. “Dress, when one has as many gowns as there are days in the year, is apt to lose its charm; admiration and adulation have ceased to excite me—I have too much of it; I have left behind me in Florence some score of adoring lovers who are all ready to die for me and for *les beaux yeux de ma cassette*; no doubt they will most of them follow me here. They all bore me; there is not a

spark of amusement to be struck from any one of them. Need I say the feminine part of my acquaintance is not more exhilarating?"

"It cannot be your liver," murmured Madame du Châtelet, pensively; "your complexion is too triumphant for that. I fear you are in love, my poor Anna."

"Love!" repeated the other, fixing her interlocutor with a look so cold, so insolent, so hard, that the little woman's sallow cheek crimsoned beneath it; "in our world, *ma chère*, that is a word which I am glad to say is becoming obsolete. Let us leave such vulgarity to occupy the little middle classes; to me the platitude is as wearisome as the *bourgeois* cant about virtue. *Virtue!* what an absurdity! The virtuous woman is merely the clever woman—she who loses her reputation a fool, neither more nor less. Luckily, as I have said, these vulgar, popular ideas are dying out among us."

Madame du Châtelet tossed her head, opened her lips for several biting retorts, and prudently closed them again in silence. The Duchess looked at her, serene once more, from under her drooping lids, and then broke into a soft laugh.

"And talking of virtue, have you heard about Virginie dell' Ormea and Prince Schwarzenheim? You do not know of it? Why, how you live, you good Romans! At least you have met our compatriot Prince Schwarzenheim—you are acquainted with him by reputation anyhow? Ah, that is well! it would be a difficult, not to say delicate task to have to give you a sketch of his career. This *grande Marquise* then happened to be the one woman remarkable for highly moral conduct in our sinful

Florence; it is a distinction like another. A party became very respectable by her very presence; to be dropped by *la dell' Ormea* was to lose one's reputation; her propriety was intolerable. With that—ugly to frighten one. Now our Austrian, the gallant, the irresistible, was naturally much in request among the fair ones, despite the rumour of his Bluebeard-like propensities; they say he has a wife in each of his castles, you know; these easy conquests were beginning to bore him too; the model *Virginie* began to look more and more askance at him when they met. One day he said he would stand her airs no longer, and a week after—behold what a joke, what a triumph, what a scandal!—*la dell' Ormea* and *Schwarzenheim* have disappeared together. His success is more tremendous than ever, need I say; as to the poor *Marquise*, he planted her in *Perugia*. There is one that will brag no more. Ah! it makes me laugh still! Where that delicious *Schwarzenheim* is I do not know.”

“He is here,” said the *Baronne*, drily, “I am sorry to say.”

“Here in Rome! *Schwarzenheim* here!” cried her friend, with more eagerness than she had yet displayed; “the only amusing man in Europe, the only man that ever amuses me; my good *Marie*, this is excellent news.”

“People's tastes differ strangely,” said *Madame du Châtelet*, snappishly; “I call him an odious man, and one that certainly should not be received by any one, young, beautiful, and unprotected, such as you”

The *Duchess* gave a good-humoured, mirthless laugh.

“Did you ever know me do anything detrimental to myself?”

“Never.”

“Have you ever known any one get the better of me? have I ever lost my head or my heart over any circumstance?”

“Never, never!”

“Then, believe me, I run no risk with Schwarzenheim. He amuses me, as I said; and oh, my good friend, if you knew what a boon it is to me to be amused now and again! There are times, I assure you, when I would give half my fortune for a new sensation.”

“Why, then, be grateful to me, for I can give you one for nothing,” cried the Baronne, rising briskly from her chair, too much a woman of the world to pursue a subject on which she and her companion seemed bound to take divergent views. “Change your things and come with me to Steven Munro’s studio, and you shall see my portrait. (He lives in your own Palazzo, by the way; it is rather piquant—of course you have never even heard of his existence!) He is quite a young man, English, and he paints . . .”—kissing her hand ecstasically in mid-air—“my portrait is a dream; you, even you, cannot see it without envy.”

“Let us go, then,” said the Duchess, yawning, and rang for her maid.

Steven Munro sat in his studio up five flights of stairs in the Palazzo Borgognone, dreaming in a bath of sunshine. His windows, wide open, admitted little gusts of balmy wind blowing straight and fresh from

the Campagna. A ceaseless babel of voices, nasal street cries, the clattering of horses' hoofs, the rattling of vehicles on the ill-paved streets, the laughter of little children—in a word, all the strange medley of sounds that characterise the Roman thoroughfare was borne in upon him in a ceaseless stream.

On the easel before him lay the sketch of a girlish head, a child's face, one would have thought, save for a certain sharpness of outline more suggestive of the awkward growing stage of life than that of the round graces of childhood.

It was a bold study of light and shade, incomplete, scarcely more than an indication of a singularly refined and original type; the features irregular but not insignificant; the eyes looking straight out of the canvas with an earnest, guileless, eager look that one felt to be very characteristic; the whole set in a wild mass of auburn hair, the colour of which was given with the uncompromising hand of the young artist who revels in its glowing tints.

At this, his work, Steven Munro sat gazing in such abstraction as to have become quite detached from his surroundings. It was not the warmth of the southern sun, but the cold, damp air of the winter time of his own native land, that seemed to encircle him; not the perfume of the narcissus flowers from the Venetian vases on his table, combined with the all-pervading indescribable odours of garlic and kindred bulbs, fried oil and cheap cigars, floating in from a Roman street through his open windows—which filled his nostrils; but the aroma of the crushed heather, the wild thyme, the peat and the moorlands of his "ain countrie." And the breath of home was passing sweet to him, the

vision of grey lands not gloomy, for the memory of a loving face and of a young head that carried its own sunshine.

There came steps on the stone stairs, and the cracked bell at the outer door of his apartments was pulled with a violence that made the loose wires jangle and jar again. With a start and a muttered execration on the intruder, Steven Munro awoke from his dream; in a trice the sketch was deposited out of sight, and a heavy easel bearing a large portrait rolled into prominence; apostrophising which as he passed, the artist strolled towards the door.

“It’s you again, I’ll be bound, you miserable little creature; you have given me more trouble than the rest of my sitters put together! . . . Ah! good afternoon, madame—an unexpected pleasure indeed.”

“Good afternoon, Mr. Munro; I have brought a friend to see my portrait.”

“The twentieth within the week!” groaned the young man internally.

A slow rustle of heavy silks, a wave of violet perfume, and with languid steps a tall fur-enveloped figure passed into the studio in the wake of the Baronne’s bustling little person, reminding Steven of a slender white-sailed yacht in tow of a steam-tug.

“Now, my painter, let me present you to the Duchessa Castelpapaccio—your landlady, by the way. My dear, this is my portrait painter, the nineteenth-century Van Dyck; you will be ravished by his work. See, here is my picture; wheel it into the light, my good sir, that we may contemplate it from its best point of view.”

“Pray, a moment’s breathing time,” murmured the

Duchess in a tone of exhaustion, scarcely acknowledging further than by a droop of her eyelids the young man's profound bow, and sinking into the first chair in her way. "How have you had the courage to face those stairs day after day? . . . Ah! this is the work in question?"

Loosening her wraps, she drew out an occasional eyeglass, and gave a careless glance at the portrait.

"Is this your portrait?" she repeated, with superb impertinence. "Ah! yes, I recognise the emeralds—really quite pretty"—with a condescending nod in the direction where Steven Munro stood, surveying her in silence.

Beautiful though she was—so beautiful that it rested and rejoiced his artist eye merely to look on her, beautiful not only in line and curve but also with the rare conjunction of delicately brilliant and harmonious colouring—he was youthful and hot-tempered enough to feel intense irritation at her fine-lady airs and contemptuous manner, and was hard set to restrain himself in his desire to show her forth with all possible despatch.

The Baronne, meanwhile, after contemplating her painted self with serene satisfaction, turned briskly to her friend.

"Well, have I not given you the new sensation you demanded? Have I not made you envious for the first time in your life? Confess you have never seen such a portrait! that black dress, the bunch of chrysanthemums just loosely falling from the film of lace, my emeralds—how clever of you to note them at once—flashing green fire, and the cloudy indefinite background! It is all of a simplicity, yet of a *chic*

which can never be surpassed or even attained again!"

"Very pretty, very pretty," drawled the Duchess, while her glance roamed deliberately on every detail of the room but the picture in question. "As you say, I burn with jealousy. Pray what else have you to show me?"

The last remark was levelled at the artist, who stood, the image of resignation, with his eyes fixed on the ground. Failing to engage his attention, the lady again addressed him, this time somewhat impatiently.

"Mr.—ah, how does he call himself, Marie? Mr. Munro!"

"Madame."

"What else have you to show me?"

Steven's cheek coloured.

"Nothing," he answered shortly, moving, as he spoke, towards the door with unmistakable significance.

"Ah, but my painter, we do not intend to leave yet," cried Madame du Châtelet, in shrill remonstrance; "the Duchess must see your group of la Bruno and her little ones; and there is that splendid head of the Turkish Ambassador—a true Bluebeard, my dear; you will be delighted with him."

The Duchess had dropped her eyeglass; stretching out her slender, exquisitely gloved hand in the direction of the Baronne's portrait, she now turned to Steven with a smile which illumined her countenance like a ray of light, and changed the whole personality of the woman in a strange and charming way.

"That is a *chef d'œuvre*," she said, in the soft,

lingering voice habitual to her, which had a sort of penetrating sweetness when she wished (she spoke very fluent English, with a little accent that was not without its attractiveness). "I do not need to see any other work to confirm me in my opinion of the painter's genius. Mr. Munro, will you paint *my* portrait?"

He looked up defiantly; this change of mood was too sudden to be flattering. He felt he was being played with, and words declining the proposal trembled on his lips.

"I promise to be very good and quiet," she went on, and once more smiled upon him.

"Madame," said the painter, colouring to the roots of his hair, "it will be an honour and a privilege."

Madame du Châtelet made a grimace behind her friend's stately back.

"Why did I bring her here?" she reflected too late, with internal disquietude. "She will turn my poor painter's head and take all shine out of my poor portrait. It is not fair to one's sex to be beautiful like that, and with her unscrupulous greed for admiration, her raging vanity, her heartlessness. . . . Yes, yes, *ma chérie*, I am coming. Monsieur Steven, I congratulate you on your good fortune."

"On my good fortune," echoed the young man, as he once more stood alone in his studio—"good fortune, is it? I wish I had had the pluck to say no, but I could not, in the teeth of that smile. What a smile! If I could only immortalise it, that would be a picture indeed. . . . Pah! what a smell of scent; it's suffocating; I must have a smoke to clear the air."

He drew a cutty pipe from his pocket, rubbed it tenderly, surveyed its grimy perfections from various points of view, and finally began to fill it with due deliberation.

“Ah, Maimie, my darling, I wish you were here to do this for me. What an interest you took in its colouring process! how we sandpapered it, and waxed it, and nursed it!” His whole face softened, he stretched out his arm towards the cabinet for the sketch he had so hastily hidden away on the approach of his visitors; checked himself midway, however, and diving his hands into his pockets, took a couple of turns up and down the room. “What a woman that is! what an extraordinary completeness of beauty! what a perfectly odious creature! I shall make a fine picture of her, though . . . in white, with dark fur somewhere—and smiling. I must have that smile and that look in her eyes.”

Twelve o'clock by Saint Peter's; twelve by all the church clocks of church-studded Rome; the angelus bell was sounding, and pious people were crossing themselves; but the muttered ejaculation that came from Mr. Munro's lips was the reverse of pious.

“An hour late,” he went on, angrily kicking a chair into place. “If she gives me much more of this sort of work, I shall chuck up the concern altogether.”

He bent his ear to listen—not a sound to announce her arrival, nothing but the ceaseless street clamour with the faint echo of panting bugles from the Campo Pretorio floating on the breeze above it, now and again.

"I shall wait no more," said Steven to himself decidedly—and even as he thought the words there came a tremendous clatter in the well of the palace courtyard, and he knew it was the Duchess's carriage.

She, however, took a long time in making her appearance, and his impatient irritation had reached fever point before he heard her long sweet tones echoing on the stairs. Biting his lips, passing nervous fingers through his hair, the artist turned with a black look to greet his new sitter; but his scowl was thrown away, for as she swept into the room, followed by a squat female figure and an immense Hungarian Chasseur bearing a minute fluffy dog, she did not even appear aware of his presence, and continued blandly to give directions to her servant in Hungarian.

"Place her here, Miklos, on the sofa, put the cushion under her, it is softer; have you brought the biscuits?—good—and my cloak? very well, now you can go."

The man, who looked as smart and unmitigated a ruffian as can well be imagined, disappeared with a guttural salute, and his mistress now addressed her unprepossessing female attendant (who had a peculiar appearance of having been mangled flat by mistake) in German.

"Sit down, Speck. You can knit if you like; we shall probably have a couple of hours of it."

"'Tis good, gracious lady," answered the Teuton stolidly, plumping down, as she spoke, on the sofa, and drawing a gigantic roll of knitting from her pocket, on which she forthwith began operations.

Languidly the Duchess next bestowed her

attentions on the old Venetian mirror, before which she began to undo her velvet mantle; then taking off her plumed hat and driving the long gold pin with which it had been fastened, into its crown with a slow deliberate stab, she wheeled round and seemed to perceive the artist for the first time.

“Good morning,” she drawled, and extended her left hand carelessly in his direction. Without noticing the proffered favour, Steven, masking his anger as best he could, under an assumption of coolness, said shortly:

“It is late; will you kindly be seated that I may begin work?”

Here the little dog, who had been uneasily sniffing its surroundings, crawled to the edge of the sofa and let itself flop heavily to the ground.

“My Fifine, my angel,” murmured the lady, picking up the beast and kissing it; then across its tangled back:

“I want her in the picture too,” she said; “will you please begin with her?”

Steven turned scarlet.

“It is impossible,” he answered hastily; “I must beg you to sit down that I may begin.”

“I am not accustomed to be hurried, sir, and I wish my dog to be painted.”

The painter and his patroness stood facing each other for a minute in silence. His keen, clean-shorn young face, now pallid again, looking like marble against the ardent hue of his hair, his bold eyes defiantly fixing her beauty. She, with softly tinted countenance and drooping eyelid, a very impersonation of lazy insolence.

Click—click—click, went the Fräulein's needles.

The feeling of the latter's impassive presence, the restless motion of her hands, the irritating and ceaseless noise produced by their activity, broke down the last straw of Steven's already sorely tried patience.

"It is best we should understand each other," he said, laying down his charcoal with a meaning gesture; "it is not my purpose to paint your dog; and unless I have absolute freedom to paint your portrait according to my own ideas, I will not undertake it at all"—then, with a sort of explosion of exasperation—"and unless that knitting is stopped I can do nothing; it is insupportable."

On this the Duchess seemed to reflect; then, half shutting her eyes, "Speck," said she, over her shoulder, "you can go."

"'Tis good, gracious lady," answered Speck, who pocketed her knitting and placidly retreated. The Duchess watched the departing figure till the closing door concealed it, then she suddenly rolled Fifine on to the floor, where the little creature fell with a sharp squeak, proceeded to the chair awaiting her on the daïs, and subsiding into it, turned smiling toward the artist, her whole attitude full of careless grace, her look of languorous sweetness.

"Like this," she said—"is it well?"

Never did woman yield more becomingly, more bewitchingly. Steven's cheeks glowed again, this time from very different feelings.

"Perfect," he cried in a low voice, and fell to sketching in the harmonious outline with trembling fingers, in a frenzy of haste to immortalise her upon

canvas in the adorable grace of that smile and attitude.

For full three minutes his new model posed as well as any professional young lady at seven-and-sixpence a day; but just as Steven, who had thrown himself into his work with the complete abstraction from other things which characterises the true artist, was beginning to convey a glimmering outline of his conception to the blank canvas, he was not a little dismayed to see the Duchess rise with a yawn, declaring she was tired to death.

“But, madame!” he cried aghast.

“But, monsieur!” she mimicked gaily, coming up to him, laughing and contracting her eyelids as she did so in a way that made him smile, despite himself, as he would on a child.

“Come, come,” she went on, “you are not to prove a tyrant, sir; five minutes’ law to look about your delightful studio, and unstiffen my limbs.”

She stretched herself daintily with that incomparable harmony movement of the perfectly well-made woman, and humming an air from *Carmen*, began picking her way about the crowded room, in and out among the old furniture, as softly as a cat.

“*L’amour est enfant de Bohème*; how dusty your books are, Mr. Munro! are you not ashamed? Ah! what lovely colours you artists do pick up; those curtains are a dream, and that bit of brocade over the door, I could commit a crime for it! . . . and there is my dear friend Marie with her face to the wall. What a trial it must have been to you, poor young man, to endeavour to make a picture of that common little personality! You should have painted

her *de profil perdu*, in a big cloak . . . Tra la la la, Tra la la la . . . An old Nuremberg credence. Inside what do I see? Chocolates! oh, the greedy! It was for the children, you say—I do not believe you. As for me, I adore them; so does Fifine.”

She inserted her slender fingers, and drew forth a handful with a little chromatic laugh.

“One for you, one for me, two for me, three for me,” crunching them with white strong teeth, “one for Fifine, poor love. Mr. Munro, if you won’t have yours, I shall eat it.”

Steven, following her in her erratic peregrinations with a sort of dog-like docility, was too much absorbed in wonder over this gracious presentment of happy youth and almost childish gaiety, so strange as compared to the haughty *blasée* woman of only a few moments ago, to find words wherewith to answer her chatter. But, as if stimulated by his bewilderment, she continued her rummaging, bubbling over with laughter the while.

“What! volumes of portfolios in that queer old cabinet! I must see them! Oh, Mr. Munro, what have we here? Sketches! this becomes interesting. *Voyons!* Young woman with red hair, profile; I don’t know that I quite care for red hair . . . in a woman; young woman with red hair, three-quarters; red head, full face, back view. *Ah, ça!* it rains, then, red heads in your island. Who is the little *laideron?*”

She held up the sketch to her own face, the same sketch that he had mused so lovingly over only yesterday morning. Poor Maimie, how cruel a contrast! what a sharp, irregular little visage it was; how

full of defects, how almost plain it looked against that living dream of beauty! Steven's heart smote him fiercely; with a hot impulse of shame and loyalty he cried in a loud voice:

"That *laideron*, as you are pleased to call her, is the most beautiful woman in the world to me."

Then he could have bitten his tongue out for its folly in speaking the words.

"Really," said the Duchess, with a hard gleam in her eyes, dropping the sketch with a gesture of such contemptuous indifference that the man felt his cheeks tingle, "one must respect all tastes, says the proverb. *Fifine*, my only treasure, thou hast not yet lunched, sweet one."

Turning to the dog, she began to feed it with the biscuits left by her servant. This process she continued for some time, teasing the little animal almost to frenzy one minute, and lavishing the most outrageously tender epithets and caresses upon it the next, without so much as a glance in Steven's direction. Beginning, however, to anticipate these sudden and apparently causeless changes of mood, Steven, gradually cooling down to his usual self-possession, stepped quietly to his easel, where he occupied himself in silence, till it pleased his troublesome sitter to favour him once more with her attention.

This she finally condescended to do, sailing back sublimely indifferent to her post, where, however, with a steadiness and patience Steven had given her little credit for, she kept strictly to the business on hand for the space of almost an hour. This lucky freak produced a most satisfactory result. As she rose to

depart, a very promising sketch adorned the large expanse of canvas.

Pulling on her long, scented gloves, the Duchess nodded her fair head in approval.

“Good-bye,” she said, and pressed his hand with a little discreet, insinuating squeeze, “till to-morrow.”

Then pausing on the threshold—

“And to-morrow, sir, you shall tell me all about the little red-haired one.”

II.

“MY OWN DEAR LITTLE MAIMIE,—I have been a long time answering you. Will you forgive your wicked boy? I have been very busy in the first place; out of sorts, dissatisfied, in the second. Not in tune with your sweetness, my darling, and unable to reply, as I ought, to your letters. I am painting the portrait of a fine lady—a very fine lady—a duchess, in fact. It ought to be a beautiful picture, for she is a beautiful creature, but, as I said, I am not satisfied either with it or with myself. At times it would seem as if I saw it through some fiendish spectacles—like little Kay in the dear old Andersen book you were so fond of—each feature seems distorted, the colours glaring, every semblance of resemblance gone, and yet I sit at it and paint, paint, paint, all day long, for the fever of work is on me, and I can do nothing else. The sitter herself is utterly antipathetic to me, for all her loveliness. I think she has an evil influence over me pretty nearly as upsetting, discomfiting, and deteriorating as yours, my white heather-bell, is the reverse. With this, she is insolent, too—treats me one day as if

I were the dirt under her feet, the next with an unlimited familiarity that is quite as uncomplimentary. In fact, I am made to feel that I am a person so insignificant, so far beneath her, that it does not matter in the least how I am dealt with. I ought to be above minding this, Maimie, but I am not; it puts me out horribly. I have not seen her now for more than a week, for after posing with tolerable regularity for three weeks—in fact, coming rather oftener than I wanted—she has suddenly ceased her visits. This I am not sorry for, as there is much I have to work at by myself, and my lady duchess will no doubt make her appearance before long—that is, when the caprice takes her. I am longing to be rid of the woman, I am longing to leave this place, I am longing for the old folk, the moors, for home, for you, *you*, my little one, my better self, my wife that is to be.”

Steven was out; it was dusk, the logs were sinking to white ash on the hearth, the letter he had but just now dashed off, in a sudden reaction of tenderness to his absent sweetheart, lay in loose sheets on his open blotter, its clear bold characters seeming to invite perusal, even in the gathering gloom. It was unfinished, for at the very height of the passionate yearning with which his thoughts were returning for his little sweetheart, the nameless disgust of all things, which for the past three weeks had been dogging his healthy young life, had overcome him with sudden loathing, and dashing down his pen, he had fled into the open air feeling the restraint of wall and roof intolerable. The studio was quite deserted,

for the olive-faced youth, whose duties brought him daily to attend to the artist, had lost no time in profiting by his master's absence to seek amusement elsewhere. There was a cold, ghostly air in the vast room, to which the dying fire lent the last touch of desolateness.

"Out, every one out," said the Duchess, looking round composedly; "doors open to the world at large. How confiding these young men are! Speck, light the candles; since there is no one to leave a message with, I shall write a note."

After much fumbling, much knocking of her shins against obtruding corners, and many undertone ejaculations of "*Oh weh!*" the docile and useful German managed to comply with the demand, and a pair of lighted candles, in quaint brass candlesticks, were placed on the rather dilapidated Buhl writing-table at which the Duchess seated herself.

"That will do; you can sit down and wait till I have done."

Fräulein Speck, never loath to seek her creature comfort, pulled Steven's best cordova leather arm-chair to the hearth, piled some logs cunningly on the red embers, and, extracting the knitting from her pocket, installed herself as if for life. Her needles clicked persistently, while the Duchess's taper fingers rustled among the papers that littered the artist's writing pad. Then for some minutes the clock and the knitting-needles had a duet all to themselves, and finally the Duchess rose with a laugh and came over to the fireplace. She stretched out her arched and slender foot to the tiny flame and laughed again.

"On second thoughts, good Speck," she said, "I

will send a note to Mr. Munro by-and-by; he might overlook it if I were to leave it haphazard in his room."

Her eyes danced; she seemed in high spirits.

"Come, Speck, come," she cried, "this is highly improper; we must blow out the lights and fly, or we shall be caught."

An hour later, Steven returned with lagging steps. His fire was burning brightly, Beppo had lit the lamp, and drawn the curtains; everything was in unimpeachable order.

On the threshold the artist paused; a vague but exquisite breath of violet seemed to greet his nostrils.

"Has any one been here?" he asked sharply of his attendant.

"No, signore, not a cat."

"I am mad," said the man to himself; strode over to the writing table, crumpled up the closely written sheets and dashed them into the fire.

"Maimie, forgive me, I cannot write to you now."

As he threw himself moodily into a chair, scowling on the fussy ministrations of his obsequious little servant, a single knock of portentous sound was struck at the door of his studio, and then entered the well-known form of Giovanni, the porter.

"A letter from the Eccellenza."

Steven opened it, paling and flushing.

"DEAR MR. MUNRO," wrote the Duchess, "I am established beneath you for a few days. (Did you know that I am your landlady, and that I come backwards and forwards to my *pied-à-terre* here when I

feel so inclined?) I am dull and tired this evening, and am not going out; will you be charitable and descend to have a cup of coffee with me at nine o'clock? We can arrange our next sitting. *Je suis au premier,*
"ANNA."

"What does she want with me? I wish to Heaven she would leave me alone. I won't go. One moment, Giovanni; I will write a note."

But as he bent his head over the blotter, a whiff of the same delicate perfume that had met him on his return that evening rose from the coronetted missive he had thrown down beside him. He seized it, almost unconsciously, and inhaled its fragrance with a deep breath. Then noisily shoving his chair away from the table:

"Tell the Duchess," he cried, "that I shall be very glad to come to-night."

The old man looked at him with friendly curiosity.

"His face was as red as his hair," he told his wife, when he went down-stairs—they took an interest in the young Englishman who had generally a nod and smile for them as he passed in and out, and a true artist liberality of small coin—"his eyes were like hot coals; I hope he may not be going to have the fever."

From the proportions of the small part of the Palazzo allotted to himself, the artist knew that the first-floor apartments must be something very magnificent. But the long perspective of tapestry-hung rooms, opening one into the other, came upon him, accustomed though he was to the spacious grandeur of a Roman palace, quite as a revelation.

Through these vast and gorgeous solitudes Steven followed the old major-domo with feelings that were the reverse of agreeable. Never before, in the proud independence of his art, poverty, and gentle breeding, had he realised the immense gulf which lay between the wealthy Duchess and her fifth-floor tenant; but the extraordinary display of nineteenth-century luxury grafted somewhat incongruously on priceless and unique relics of antiquity, the state, the pomp, the opulence, coupled with the accumulated splendour of ages through which he was marshalled, opened his eyes to a better knowledge of what his true position must be in the eyes of his beautiful sitter.

In the reaction of wounded self-esteem, evoked by these reflections, he entered the Duchess's warm, flower-filled, scented boudoir with so haughty a bearing, and such deliberate self-possession, that the conversation, which was brisk between the few guests then present, was abruptly interrupted, and all eyes were turned towards the tall, pallid, red-haired young man who came in upon them as if he were lord of all and disdained his possessions.

The Baronne du Châtelet, carrying on a laborious flirtation with an ancient beau, tried in vain to attract his attention as he passed, but he made his way straight to his hostess without wasting a glance.

The Duchess was sitting at a small table near the end of the room, playing chess with a dark, portly, handsome man a little past the prime of life, whose prominent, openly admiring gaze was scarcely ever withdrawn from her face, and whose capacious chest gleamed with stars and orders, the magnificence of which seemed, somehow, to have found a fitting place

there. She was all in white, a loose flowing gown of some clinging, silken stuff which, with consummate art, threw into greater relief all those rounded graces it feigned to conceal. Her voluminous sleeves, fashioned after some mediæval freak of fancy, were slit up to the shoulder, and her bare arms shone forth in all their pearl-like beauty at every movement.

Silently she stretched out her left hand to the new-comer, while with the right she slowly shifted her last remaining rook along the board. The soft hand remained in his cold clasp as if unconsciously.

"Check to your king," said her antagonist, quietly removing the rook with firm, plump fingers, "and mate, I think."

With an inexpressible pang Steven felt her withdraw her lingering touch.

"Alas!" she cried, "I can do nothing but confess that you have vanquished me, Prince!"

"Nay, do not complain," replied the victor, smiling on her with bold intentness, "it is fair that once in a way our poor sex should have its turn, be it only in a game."

With this he rose from his seat.

"Are you going?" she asked, surprised.

"I infinitely regret, but I am due at the Quirinal."

The Duchess shrugged her shoulders slightly, and placed her hand in his. He bent low over it; Steven saw that he had a round bald spot at the top of his head, and was savagely glad; and then, as the other straightened himself and their eyes met, he felt the blood rush to his cheeks under the full, curious stare which was so strangely yet so intangibly insulting to him that every atom of his being rose in antagonism

to the handsome, commanding personality before him. His hands unconsciously closed ; oh, to feel his fist against that smiling, that sickening face !

“ Prince Schwarzenheim, you must make the acquaintance of my portrait painter, Mr. Steven Munro. You will, I know, be glad some day to look at the works of his genius. I am not saying too much in saying genius,” said the Duchess sweetly ; “ it is a word often misused, but not in this case.”

The bow, the few sentences addressed to him by the Prince, the final gesture at parting, were full of courtliest *bonhomie*, but to Steven there seemed an odious familiarity in the manner of their delivery, and he could scarcely connect two civil words in reply.

“ Good-bye, good-bye, Prince,” said the Duchess, then turned to the artist and motioned him to the vacated chair with one of her caressing smiles.

“ Do you play chess ? Will you have a game with me ? I wonder if I could beat you ? ”

The corners of her mouth were quivering upwards ; their eyes met and melted into each other. Steven felt his heart contract ; with a sudden fierce passion he realised how he loved her.

Mechanically he sat down and began to help her in the rearrangement of the pieces, conscious of nothing save the tumult within, the madness, the misery, the shame.

He was so close to her that he could see the silken threads of her bronze hair, as fine as gossamer, shining against the light ; the sweep of her long dark lashes as they rose and fell ; the grain of her white cheek as smooth and close as ivory ; her arm gleamed in and out of her sleeve as with round gestures of

exquisite grace she replaced the chessmen on the board ; once her taper fingers touched his as softly as a butterfly's wing. He thought of Maimie's thin, red, child's hands, and could have found it in him to have wept aloud.

How he played that game he never knew ; had not the Duchess been even below the average of the usual feminine chess-player, she could easily have beaten him in a couple of moves ; as it was, however, he instinctively did the right thing, now and again, which sufficed to keep the game on indefinitely. One by one the other guests retired, until none were left but the Baronne and her aged diplomat. At length she, too, apparently wearied of the task of endeavouring to devote one eye and both ears to the chess-players and bestow at the same time a semblance of attention on her gallant if somewhat drivelling companion, arose from her seat and made her way over to them, volubly expatiating on the sad necessity of her immediate departure.

"We must be going, Bimbo and I ; it is desolating to be forced to tear oneself away from thee, thus early, but thou knowest, *ma chère*, when it is to the Quirinal for us diplomatic people it is no longer an invitation but a command. Would thou wert coming also ; but of course to thee, thou black of blacks, it seems an impropriety even to say such a thing ; I must own I regret thy loss to-night."

"Regret nothing for me," said the Duchess calmly ; "I am very happy here."

"Well, *adieu, au revoir* ; I must fly—the hour advances. Count Bimbo, you have promised to profit of my carriage. Till to-morrow, *ma toute belle*."

But although Madame du Châtelet again repeated several times—each time with as much freshness and energy as if she had never said it before—“We must fly, Bimbo, we must fly,” she showed no signs of spreading her wings, but remained wriggling her sallow shoulders and rolling her round black eyes furtively in Steven’s direction.

“Mr. Munro is thinking of moving on too, perhaps,” she remarked at length, in a tone of obviously assumed airiness; “there is room in my carriage for him also, if I can set him down anywhere.”

The Duchess shot a glance at the little lady that was not altogether pleasant.

“You forget that Mr. Munro lodges here,” she said, with an accentuated drawl, showing a fine array of white teeth in a slow smile; “I keep Mr. Munro to amuse me with chess. Good-night.”

The Baronne shrugged her shoulders significantly.

“Good-night,” she said drily, whisked round, caught her cavalier by the arm, and, ruthlessly cutting short a most flowery and intricate speech, hurried him out of the room.

The Duchess listened till the sound of closing doors announced their safe departure, then swept all the chess-men off the board, threw her white arms above her head, leant back in her chair, and laughed aloud.

“At last,” she said, and looked at Steven through half-closed lids, after a way she had, and laughed again with delicious, careless abandonment.

“Do you know what I want to do?” she said, bending forward with her finger on her lips and

speaking in a mischievous whisper; "I want to go to your studio and see my picture by lamp-light."

He stood up stiffly, a thrill of mingled delight and fear running through his frame.

"What folly!" he exclaimed through his teeth.

"Folly!" she echoed with a scornful toss of her head; "no, trust me, I am in the humour for a little adventure, but I do not mean to expose myself with you." The look that she cast on him as she said these words, half good-humoured, half-contemptuous, brought an angry flush to his cheek. "Now listen to me: I shall go up by the back stairs, having first donned Eulalia's cloak. She is my maid, you know; I can trust her, for she is in my power; she and I are much of a height, and I can easily pass for her. If any one should see me then—it is not probable—people will say that you have an intrigue with her. What more natural?" Again the glare, with its gay insolence, that was so hard to bear. "Unless, therefore, you betray me, sir, I am safe."

"So be it, then," muttered Steven, with a pale look, retreating towards the door; "how soon may I hope to see you?"

She pointed with her finger laughingly, to the figure of twelve on the little *Capo di Monte* clock on the mantelshelf—it wanted then some twenty-five minutes of that hour—and rang the bell for the servant to show him out.

With a maddening vision of her face before him, a horrible sense of treachery and disgrace upon him, and a perfect fury of contending emotions within him, Steven mounted with wild speed to his apartment and attended instantly to the few precautions against

discovery it was in his power to take. He satisfied himself that Beppo had retired to his own home; secured the ordinary entrance, and set ajar the seldom used door that opened on to the back stairs. He was the only tenant of that floor, there was, therefore, luckily nothing to fear from curious neighbours; but Steven, lighting his lamp, went through the empty rooms one after another, to make "assurance doubly sure" that nothing should be wanting on his side to protect his visitor from intrusion.

Then he returned to the studio, lit the candles, built up the fire, hastily put a little order into the surroundings, and throwing himself into a chair, awaited the nocturnal guest.

Consecutive, reasonable thought was quite out of the question; his brain seemed on fire; he scarce knew which it was, love or hate for this woman that most raged in his heart; but one thing was certain—for the moment his whole being was centred on her with a passion no one had ever aroused within him before.

A door creaked, there was the sound of a light step, and a woman quickly entered the room, enveloped in a dark cloak, the hood of which was drawn over her head.

"Her Excellency the Duchessa has sent me," said a voice in sibilant Venetian sing-song, at the accents of which the young man's pulses almost ceased to beat in a paroxysm of anger. What infernal trick was this?

"Ah, ah, *mon Dieu!*" cried the Duchess, throwing back her hood and disclosing her laughing face full of mischievous enjoyment. "How murderous you look! It seems I am a good mimic, then!"

She unclasped her cloak, and threw it off. "Now, sir, do me the honours of your studio. Stay, I am cold, let me sit and warm myself a little."

He took her hand with daring pressure, and led her to the arm-chair by the fire. It was after all a chance that would come to a man but once in a lifetime; it was none of his seeking, and she was adorably beautiful. "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die;" why not enjoy the hour without retrospection or forecast?

Leaning his back against the mantelpiece, he allowed his gaze to rest on her with unconcealed admiration. She had changed her white robes for a plain short black gown; but hers were looks that needed no adventitious adornment.

"Why did I not paint you as you are now?" he cried. "In that simple dress you are a million times more lovely than in all your silks and satins."

She shot a swift inquiring look at him, then smiled; she seemed not displeased.

"Do you know," said she, bending her pliant figure forward and stretching out her hands to the blaze, "that you are a very strange young man. I have had my portrait painted, one, two, three, four times" (checking the numbers on her fingers), "and every artist sang a litany to my perfections from beginning to end of the business. Now this is the first compliment you ever have paid me."

An ardent flood of words rose to Steven's lips, but were arrested unspoken by the Duchess's sudden rising from her seat and the half-laughing, half-coy manner in which she turned away from the glowing fixity of his eyes.

"The portrait, my friend, the portrait! Ah! here it is, I see; if you would be so kind as to hold the light." Then her whole countenance transfigured by one of those smiles which were so peculiarly bewitching and so peculiarly her own. "Ah, Mr. Munro, am I really like that? I crave your pardon, sir, for that I accused you just now of lacking gallantry. None of my painters has ever paid me such a compliment as this," indicating her own fair likeness with a wave of her hand.

"I am glad you like it," said he simply, while his heart beat high with elation.

"Like it?" she echoed, with a soft laugh. "Tell me truly, are you sure you have not flattered me?"

"Ask your mirror."

"No, no, I prefer what the picture says; in the mirror I can see myself with my own eyes, there with yours—I prefer that."

The last words came after a slight pause, with a hesitating modulation and a look which Steven would have been more than human to be proof against. Setting down the candle he held, he turned quickly to her with a face suddenly white, lips quivering, eyes ablaze; but again the Duchess, feigning not to perceive his movement, eluded him by a swift step aside and one of her elfish changes of mood.

"Mr. Munro, Mr. Munro," with a little peal of laughter, "I am so hungry, I am so hungry! Do you think you could give me something to eat? . . . Now, your old oak press over there looks to me as if it contained good things. I must see." She slipped through the encumbering furniture and went down

on her knees before the great Nürnberg cabinet, still chattering like a child, and laughing till every ivory tooth gleamed between the expanded crimson lips; Steven passed his hand over his damp brow and followed her with a sombre look.

“ Ah! I knew I was right, a *fiaschetto*, a salame, some bread; so far, so good. Mr. Munro,” stretching out her hand, “ come and help me up; you and I will lay the table together, and we shall have a little supper. *Allons, mon ami*, be quick. Oh, how cold your hands are ! ”

She pulled her fingers from his passionate hold with a petulant gesture.

“ The table-cloth, sir, the table-cloth ! ”

With a sort of desperation he tried to throw himself into her mood.

“ Will this do ? ” drawing forth an old piece of Eastern, yellow-embroidered linen from some hidden recess and holding it up to her gaze with hands that shook despite all his efforts to control them.

“ Delightful! Help me to move this old marqueterie table nearer the fire The candelabras, please, both of course; what are you thinking of to put three candles down together! don't you know how unlucky it is? One each side, that's it. Now this Venetian jug with the jonquils for the middle, how festive they look! Mr. Munro, do bustle a little; why do you stand staring like that? I want plates, knives, forks, glasses, the bread, the wine, and the sausage. Oh ! ”—with a ripple of laughter—“ I hold to the sausage. Come, that is right; I was beginning to fear you were threatened with the fate of Lot's wife. What Venetian glasses, old Delft

plates, a Périgord pie too! Ah, you bachelors refuse yourselves nothing. *Encore*, figs, grapes, and bananas on a real majolica dish. Nothing is wanting it seems. *Mon Dieu*, this is gay, this is amusing!"

She extended her quaint beaker to be filled, held it up, and toasted him with a gesture of the most coquettish joviality, and sipped the rough red wine between little gusts of musical laughter.

The man watched her as if in a dream. How lovely she looked when she laughed like that! what white teeth she had! what dimples at the corners of her lips! what a liquid shine had those grey-green eyes of hers between the dark lashes and the contracted eyelids! A sensation of unreality, as if this strange midnight feast were nothing but the fanciful creation of his brain, began to grow upon him, increasing in its intensity every minute. The control of his own conduct seemed to have completely passed out of his keeping; he let himself go, as if it were indeed but a dream, to the current of events, with a curious feeling that whatever awaited him it could cause him no surprise.

"A little of that cream cheese, if you please," said the Duchess. "Mr. Munro, you are not conversational, and only that you do not eat, I should say you were famishing by the way you watch me gobbling. Ah, ha, ha, ha"—drawing in and exhaling her breath with a long, laughing sigh—"I have not amused myself like this since I was sixteen, when I went to the '*bal de l'opéra*' in Paris with a naughty cousin. Oh, the husband was there—it was quite proper, at least in the way of chaperonage. How I laughed, and how I was scolded! Since then I have rarely had a frolic;

my life has been ruled by strict propriety and dulness—*ennui, ennui, ennui* has been my daily bread. But I do not mean to sacrifice any longer to the proprieties. *Vogue la galère!* I said the other morning I would give worlds for a new sensation. Sir Painter, how shall I reward you for affording me one? I have been amused for once—I am amused.”

She looked at him with a wide smile, in which her beauty seemed to reach its triumph.

“What reward dare I ask for?” said the man hoarsely.

“You can peel me a banana, if you like, Mr. Munro. No, don’t get up, if you please. Mr. Munro, there is something I wish to draw your attention to, a little contrast I am desirous of showing you. I love contrasts and incongruities. Remain seated, sir, I say, or I shall go—I know exactly where to find what I want. Oh, how dusty your portfolio is! ‘Pfui!’ as Speck says; I believe it has not been touched since I did so myself. Ah, here she is, *la belle rousse!* Now we shall stand her there beside my portrait; I am anxious to know what effect my face makes beside that of the most beautiful woman in the world. Come now, sir, look—what is your opinion?”

She turned and mocked with little dancing demons in each eye.

He did not look towards the portraits; what need had he to do so? Was not the contrast stamped deep enough on his heart, cut into it, Heaven help him, with lines that would leave their mark for ever? Without removing his glaring eyes from her lovely, taunting face, he remained speechless, confronting

her for a minute which seemed an age, measured by his laboured heart-beats.

Then in the stillness some church clock close by sent forth one resonant note.

The Duchess simulated a start of surprise.

“So late!” she whispered, with a pretty assumption of alarm, contradicted by the eyes that would sparkle, the mouth that would quiver into that irrepressible smile. “Heavens, if my good Marie only knew, she would die—of jealousy! Good-bye, monsieur, good-night”—throwing her cloak over her shoulders—“good-night, and thank you.”

The man’s last straw of self-possession here gave way.

With a desperate spring he made for the door to intercept her exit, knocking over a chair in his way, that in its turn fell heavily against the rickety supper-table, and upset it, candles, supper, pottery and all, in one great crash.

The Duchess gave a scream which ended in a high-pitched note of laughter. They were plunged in darkness, through which filtered gradually the glowing firelight. Picking up her skirts, the lady daintily sought her way through the fragments of ware, the wine-sopped remnants of food, across the floor.

“Good-night, Mr. Munro,” she said to the dark figure that barred her passage, looming hugely on her in the uncertain glimmer. His passion broke forth wildly—

“By Heaven, you shall not go. You think you can fool me as you like, play with me as a cat with a mouse, pick me up and drop me. You have not

rested till you drove me mad, till you made me false to my troth; now we must understand each other; you shall hear me and answer me. I will be treated thus no more. I have had enough of it! I am master here, and you do not go."

The Duchess threw the wings of her cloak back over her shoulder, her face looked palely forth from the dark shadow of her hood; in a voice through which ran a little tremor—was it merriment or fear?—

"*Eh bien,*" she murmured, "I am at your mercy."

In the leaping firelight her beauty shone with marvellous radiance.

"At the mercy of one who loves you to distraction!" cried Steven hoarsely, and stretched out his arms to clasp her to him. But slowly she retreated from him, and deftly, inch by inch, drawing him after her in a blind, foolish way by the glamour of her eyes.

"What was it you said? that you loved me?" she was saying in her languorous drawl. "Let us sit down—since you will it absolutely then—a few minutes more. So you fancy that you love me, foolish boy?"

They reached the sofa, he still a little behind her, spellbound by her look. But his last step had taken him out of the line with the door; and even as the tender accents of her voice still lingered in the air, the Duchess seized her opportunity, and with a movement as noiseless and agile as a cat's darted across the room. She had gained the door, had opened it and was gone with a rush of flying feet and a trail of eldritch laughter before the man—

bewildered, frenzied—had even time to realise her intention.

Then with a curse, deep and loud, he dashed in pursuit. The sight of the last flutter of her cloak disappearing down the little stairs at the end of the passage lent wings to his feet. At headlong speed he nearly flung himself down the turning wooden steps, plunging recklessly into almost total darkness, maddened by the sound of the pattering feet before him. But, just as he was gaining upon her, just as he could almost feel the flapping of her garments and hear her panting breath, there came a flash of light upon his eyes, which a door swinging back instantly extinguished, and after this the sharp sound of the shooting of a bolt, and again a rippling laugh, growing fainter and fainter in the distance.

III.

“Do you not mean to come any more to the studio? What can be your object in treating me like this? It is now ten days since that night—that night when you were so kind and so cruel. I have called at the Villa; you are never at home. My only glimpse of you has been last Thursday, when I saw you driving in the Borghese with Prince Schwarzenheim—*that man!* Did you not see me? You turned your head away. I cannot stand it. I am desperate. You know that you have made me mad with love for you; you did so deliberately, with set purpose, Heaven knows why; it certainly was none of my seeking; and now, this avoidance of me, this silence. I will not stand it. As I have said, I am desperate. My

patience is at an end. I will keep the whole of to-morrow free from visitors, in case you should come in answer to this. I *must* have an explanation with you; you *must* come to me, or I to you! Duchess, you will come! God help me, what have I sunk to? I implore you to come."

With his very heart's blood he seemed to have written it—in short, sharp sentences wrung from the seething anguish of his humiliation, love, and rage. For ten days he had not slept, nor worked, nor scarcely taken food. Wild-eyed, haggard, he had haunted the gates of the palace, the gardens, the road to the Villa, in the vain hope of encountering the Duchess. Worn out, at length, he summoned all his manhood for a last effort.

The letter written, he brought it himself to the Villa, and gave the servant a gold piece to deliver it into her hands. And then he came back to his studio and passed another terrible night in restless pacing up and down the room, in red-eyed watching the mocking serene beauty of her portrait, in sinister brooding over a pistol, weighing in the disordered balance of his mind if that were not the best way out of it after all.

At length came blessed dawn, and, in his arm-chair, he fell asleep, the dreamless lethargy of exhaustion, to awaken again only when the broad sun streaming into his room announced the fulness of day. The rest had done him good, short as it was, relieved the tension of his brain, and strengthened his exhausted nerves. After artificially bracing himself by a cold bath and a cup of strong coffee, he wiled the time

away by an elaborate rearrangement of the studio, and the disposing of a wealth of white lilies which he had despatched Beppo to purchase with a reckless disregard of economy. Then he dismissed the curious little attendant, and there came a weary period of anxious waiting, and alternations of hope and despondency that shook his soul like an ague. When at length an impatient hand sent the old bell-wires jangling, the excitement of his anticipation was actually physically painful, and his heart seemed to beat suffocatingly in his throat—he felt his face grow drawn and livid as he hastened to open the door.

Yes, it was she. His ear seized upon those well-known, trailing tones outside with a rapture of joy that drove the blood once more to his cheeks. If only she had come alone—well, it was but right that she should think of her reputation. She had come, that was the great thing. It would go hard with him if, on some pretext or other, he did not get rid of the unwelcome chaperon by-and-by.

With hands that shook with eagerness he lifted the latch to admit her.

“How good of you, my dear Prince, to come up these appalling stairs with me. I shall not keep you long, however, only the time to transact this little business.”

Every word rang out with fatal clearness as she entered, with an insolence of bearing, an insolence of look, impossible to describe. She was speaking German, with an accentuated length of utterance that had its insolence too, sweetly, coldly cruel.

In the revulsion of feeling that convulsed his whole being, Steven for an instant nearly lost

consciousness, and groped at the door for support ; but the sight of Prince Schwarzenheim, large, genial, patronising, the amused curious glance of those prominent eyes, aroused all the pride within him to cloak his agony from their odious gaze. With an immense effort he regained outward composure, and followed the Duchess and her cavalier to the studio with a rigid coldness of demeanour.

But the sickly pallor of his face he could not hide, nor the beads of perspiration that stood on his forehead.

“I fear we have come at a wrong moment,” said Prince Schwarzenheim in courteous tones, turning to the young man with a well-bred gesture of concern—“Mr. Munro seems ill.”

The Duchess directed her eyes towards Steven. From under drooping lids, what a glance that was—how crude, how brutal ! Steven meeting it, saw in that instant, as if a mask had fallen from her face, all the moral distortion of the woman, and his passion for her died within him with a great spasm of loathing.

With a smile, the smile that had wrought Steven’s undoing, she turned to the Prince.

“It will not be long,” she murmured, and tossed him her sable muff, from which she had previously drawn a letter-case ; and then addressing the painter :

“Mr. Munro,” she said, with marked deliberation, while a narrow line of pupil glittered on him from between her eyelids, “my portrait pleases me as it is ; I shall come no more. Here is your money. Ten thousand lire is the price agreed upon, I believe ; to which however, I have added another thousand for

extra trouble caused by my bad posing. You will find it correct, I trust."

Steven shuddered from head to foot. His fingers twitched convulsively with the insensate desire to clutch and crush the life out of the round white throat that dared to breathe forth such insults; a red intangible mist rose before his eyes.

She stood triumphantly fixing him with her insufferable gaze, and holding out towards him, with the tips of her fingers, the crisp bundle of bank-notes.

Scenting some little unpleasantness, Prince Schwarzenheim, in his easy way, walked humming to the Duchess's picture, which he feigned to examine with absorbing interest.

After a few moments she turned away, shrugging her shoulders, deposited the notes on the nearest table, carelessly throwing across them, to keep them in their places, the first thing that came to hand—a battered dagger of curious antiquity—and saying briefly, in the direction of the artist's stony, staring figure, "You will have the kindness to send the portrait to the Villa," once more renewed conversation in German with Prince Schwarzenheim.

"It is a pity, is it not, that I should have to take it thus unfinished?"

"I do not know that I should regret it, if I were you, Duchess," replied he, straightening himself from his bent posture of scrutiny and retreating a few steps to take a comprehensive view of the object in question. "It has talent undoubtedly, even a touch of genius; but the work is young, the novice hand—vigorous, feeling though it be—is visible in every stroke. This being the case, the work has a charm,

a *chic*, in its present sketchy state, that it would completely lose were it elaborated and finished. Nature, we know, that great and unerring artist, gives us all that is young in a sort of undeveloped condition, which, though incomplete, has a peculiar beauty of its own: a girl in her teens, a kitten, a blossom are *ébauches* if you will, but delicious: now your portrait, only indicated as it is—the bud, as it were, of the spring-time of genius——”

“Ah, for pity’s sake,” interrupted the lady ruthlessly, “spare me, *mon ami*, the rest of this dissertation on art. Remember I have been perforce in the company of one of its votaries day after day, for hours at a time; I have had it over my ears”—yawning widely—“but, thank God, that is done with.”

“Allow me at least to say, in justice to the poor youth, that in this picture of you he has shown a wonderful comprehension of your ideal beauty, *meine Schöne*. I must make him my compliment.”

And smiling benevolently, Prince Schwarzenheim took a step towards Steven.

“The work does you great credit,” he said, in his fat, pleasant voice, and somewhat broken yet dauntless English. “It is really clever—more than clever.”

Grinding his teeth, Steven bowed low in disdainful acknowledgment.

“You have achieved a success,” pursued the older man, with increased affability. “A few more years’ study and practice, my young friend, and I can promise you a brilliant career.”

“Come, come, Prince,” cried the Duchess, tapping him sharply on the arm with her pocket-book, “that is enough. One smothers here with all these flowers.”

She cast a sneering glance around on those white lilies Steven had arranged with such lavish love in every corner of the old room.

"We lose time in this attic; I am due at Marie Braunhof's, and I have to pass by my dressmaker's to speak about my costume for to-night. *Apropos*, this fancy ball at the English Embassy: you are coming, of course? Oh, see there," interrupting her languid movements towards the door with a petulant exclamation, "my shoe is untied; on your knees, Prince, on your knees, and repair the disaster."

"Disaster, call you it?" smiled the other, fatuously, while with some slight difficulty he brought his portly person into the required position, "say rather the rapturous opportunity."

"Always gallant," retorted the Duchess, in a mocking tone, while her look sought Steven's white, disgusted face with a furtive inquiring look, and again a smile lifted the corners of her lips. Then, with an impatient little jerk which necessitated a fresh start in her cavalier's task, she once more addressed him, continuing to speak in her native language, apparently for the purpose of excluding the artist from their conversation, though from the first moment of her entrance it was plain he understood her every word.

"Well, what of the ball—are you going? Answer me that. I have a reason for asking."

"Is the question necessary, when you are expected there?"

"Ah, that is well, for I have a project: what say you to a little *souper intime* with me at the Villa afterwards? You and I *tête-à-tête*—will you?"

Gazing up at her with a look that gave Steven—whose fierce watchful eyes not an iota of this little scene escaped—a positive feeling of nausea:

“Will I?” echoed the Prince, in a tone of jesting stage declamation; “will the sunflower follow her god? will the moth seek the light? will a starving man refuse bread? My dear Duchess, you have sketched a programme the temptingness of which baffles words to define.”

He sat back on his heels and blew a kiss into space. Steven itched with a good healthy longing, that for the moment well-nigh shook him out of his unnatural state of tension, to raise the elderly Adonis by a well-applied kick.

“So then it is arranged,” laughed the lady—“(what not finished yet? make haste, my Prince)—we meet first at the ball, and then *chez moi*. I shall leave before you, of course, for the sake of propriety—for this is between you and me, you know, my good friend,” with a sweet, taunting look. “By the way, what do you wear in the way of costume, that I may recognise you?”

“Oh, I!” with a fat laugh, rising laboriously to his feet, “a man of my dimensions, you understand, dearest Duchess, does not put vanity into these displays; I shall wear the uniform of my regiment, *tout bêtement*.”

“But what could you wear more gorgeous, or more romantic, all impregnated as it must be with the reminiscences of your gallant exploits, Prince! And very gallant they were by all accounts.”

“Ah, I was a sad dog! do not remind me of the follies of my stormy youth, so long done away with.”

Thereupon he wagged his head with much humour, and, laughing meaningly and in concert, they gained the door.

But as the Prince stood back to let his fair companion pass out, Steven, suddenly awakening into angry vivacity, stepped quickly forward, and barred his exit with outstretched arms.

"A word with you," he cried, in a passionate whisper.

Blandly the Austrian strove to wave him aside.

"Believe me, my friend, you are not well. You should go and rest."

"Curse your grinning face and your patronising insolence!" broke from the young man under his breath, with uncontrollable fury. "You came here with that woman to-day with the set purpose of insulting me. You mistake your man if you think I mean tamely to pocket your infamous behaviour. Things cannot end here; you understand me?"

Prince Schwarzenheim shrugged his shoulders with the air of one who deems it useless to argue with a maniac.

"We shall talk of this again," he said soothingly; "this is not the moment for such a conversation. Moreover, you are ill, I am sure; you have a touch of fever; you are really not fit to discuss anything now."

And profiting of his opportunity, he slipped through the door and followed the Duchess downstairs, not without a certain alacrity. With a murderous look Steven let him depart. It was not the moment, as his enemy had said; and besides, the

Duchess would but have found another triumph in the open scandal of an assault then and there.

“What was he saying to you, that creature?” came her cadenced notes echoing up the vaulted staircase.

“Only a little compliment at parting. You were a trifle hard on the budding genius, were you not?”

“He was becoming intolerable, not to be borne. If I gave you twenty guesses you would never divine the extent of his audacity.”

A murmured answer, a trilling laugh, and then the voices commingled confusedly, and died away in the distance.

Steven locked the outer door of his apartment, went back into his studio, and sat down.

The white, innocent flowers, the sweet and exquisite head of his painted Duchess, stared at him, and mocked him in the shrieking solitude. He clutched his curly red hair, with desperate, frenzied fingers. . . . What ignominy, what pollution, what dishonour to him, to Steven Munro, who had ever kept himself so proudly dignified! Fooled by a worthless woman, fooled by her white and crimson smile, her long soft looks, her womanly, unwomanly, taunting ways! Untrue to his word, faithless to his trust, and then insulted, mocked, betrayed, disgraced! . . . What remained to him? what was to be done?

His eyes wandered vaguely round the room, till they rested suddenly on the old dagger lying across the bundle of bank-notes.

There lay the shameful money, the palpable

insult, and, in strange juxtaposition, the very weapon which his Highland forefathers had used to such stern purpose to drown in blood the rankling memory of an affront.

He slowly crossed the room, and taking up the skene, rude, black, imbued with the associations of centuries of wild deeds, fingered it with a loving touch.

One thing yet remained to him, after all—revenge!

He grasped the ancient arm by the handle with quick, fierce elation, and forced the flimsy notes on its blade till they rested on the guard, savagely, as if they were living things to slay. Then he turned to the portrait, and, after gazing for a moment murderously at its beauty, slashed its smiling face across twice with a clean, swift, dreadful gash.

The sweet face smiled on in ghastly contrast to its disfigurement. Steven drew forth the dagger again, and gazed at it wildly, as if expecting to find it wet with blood.

He laughed with fierce exultation. Yes, there was something still left for him to do.

To-night, after the ball, at her Villa, she would be waiting for her lover, that vilest of creatures, who defiled humanity by calling himself man. . . . Till then, patience!

He placed the dagger in his bosom and went forth into the streets.

IV.

A TROPICAL deluge of rain had swept over the face of Rome; the rare shrubs in the Villa garden drooped, their luxuriant branches heavy with hanging drops; the uncouth fragments of ancient statuary, rugged headless trunks and trunkless heads, twisted torsos and disjointed limbs, which studded the avenue, shone from the uncertain gloom of their surroundings with goblin-like distinctness. The ground beneath Steven's feet exuded moisture like a full sponge; a wild, fitful wind came souging at intervals through the ilex trees, dashing spray into his face and moaning off into the distance. Nature, like a passionate child, was subsiding into tranquillity after the storm, shaken now and then by a tremulous reminiscence. But her calmer mood had no effect, this night, on Steven's burning blood; absorbed in his own resolve, he stood in the shadow of a huge ilex towards the middle of the drive, half leaning on a couple of slender sabres, whose hilts he clasped with one hand, waiting, as he had been waiting ever since midnight, for the moment of action.

It was now nearly two in the morning; the clouds were breaking athwart the moon's disc, and her light pouring down with ever-increasing steadiness from the clearing vault above. The colonnades of the Villa loomed whitely forth from the surrounding foliage, with here and there a leaf gleaming like burnished silver. A rosy light, filtered from behind one window, crossed occasionally by a flitting shadow. There, no doubt,

the faithful Eulalia, whom the Duchess trusted, was putting the last touches to that little supper which awaited her and her cavalier. . . . Oh, it should be a merry feast to-night, he would see to that!

Hark! the rolling of carriage wheels; the rhythm of horses' hoofs on the road; now the sharp, sucking sound of their tread on the soaking avenue. A flash of light across his watching eyes, the vision of a white face at the window, and she had passed. He heard the horses draw up before the entrance, the slamming of doors; and the carriage crunched away to the stables at the back.

His time was coming—patience still. He fingered the dagger in his breast with a smile, and shifted once more the weapons on which he leant. Swiftly the clouds, flying from the moon's fair countenance, massed themselves in rolling gloom on the eastern horizon. The artist looked up at the heavens, and once more smiled. Before that pure light began to wane, he should need it no longer, for the Prince was too gallant a courtier to keep a lady lingering.

And now, what was this? Steps behind him on the short turf; so stealthy, so measured as scarcely to have been audible to ears less keenly on the alert, less intensely strung to listen.

The snapping of a twig beneath a heavy foot, and a dark, bulky form moved swiftly along towards the house, keeping carefully in the shade of the azaleas and rhododendrons.

Turning sharply, Steven saw it, and with a loud laugh, half of triumph, half of scoffing contempt at his own simplicity, he leaped into the centre of the moonlit space that divided him from the new-comer.

He had nearly missed his vengeance, after all; for, while he was watching the avenue, through a private entrance the Duchess's guest was creeping towards his rendezvous.

As the wild lithe figure sprang out into the light and hailed him, the Prince stopped, and came forward with a gesture of surprise, doubt, and alarm.

Steven flung off his hat, and bowed low with a mockery that was almost joyous.

"Will you favour me with your attention for five minutes, Prince?" he cried gaily. The wind blew his hair from his forehead, which shone in the moonlight with a strange brightness. "We have still to finish that little conversation begun at my studio door this morning; but I trust it will not take too much of your valuable time."

"Mr. Munro!" ejaculated the Prince amazedly; then with a dark frown, which altered the whole character of his handsome, contented, sensual face, into something inexpressibly arrogant, "what comedy is this?" he said.

Again Steven laughed aloud. Never had he felt more curiously elated, more sure of himself, more master of the situation.

"Only the last act of a little comedy in which you have had the *beau rôle*, Prince," he answered, with the same indescribable mixture of underlying ferocity and surface playfulness which had characterised his former utterance. "Oh!"—as the Austrian made an impatient movement towards the Villa—"I know whither you are bound, and, believe me, I have too much sympathy with your ardour to wish to detain you an instant longer than the

time to settle this trifling matter. With your leave we shall proceed to business at once."

He threw his cloak away as he spoke, and holding out the two sabres towards his companion—

"Be so kind as to choose."

"He is mad!" exclaimed Prince Schwarzenheim, addressing the trees with a despairing shrug of his shoulders—"raging mad! My good sir, I told you this afternoon that you were ill; this, allow me to remark, is the veriest delirium."

"Prince Schwarzenheim," said Steven, with great deliberation, coming close up to him and putting his young, determined face on a level with the other's heavy, sin-worn countenance—"Prince Schwarzenheim, you are a scoundrel."

Under this assault the elder man seemed suddenly to recover his usual urbane self-possession.

"My young friend," he said, in that good-tempered tone of condescending familiarity that was so galling to the artist's quick blood, "you are pleased to be complimentary, but I have seen too much of these matters to bear you malice. Take the advice of my experience; pocket your little grievance and go home to bed. Do not commit the absurdity of trying to turn what you aptly term a little comedy into high tragedy. Everything is pardonable in these episodes save the ridiculous."

"Come, come, defend yourself," cried the artist, flinging one of the swords on the ground and handling the other himself with a fierce menacing grip; "I will bandy words no longer."

"Do you suppose, for a moment, that you can frighten me into this nonsense?" said Prince Schwarzenheim,

surveying the shining blade turned on him, with a quiet smile; "I am not afraid of your murdering me, neither have I the least intention of crossing swords with you. Put down your weapon, sir," he added, in a tone of dignified command, striking aside with his gloved hand the point that quivered within three inches of his breast, "and let this foolish scene come to an end."

He once more turned to go, but Steven, extending his left arm, gripped his wrist fiercely.

"No, by Heaven, you do not leave me till the indignity I have suffered at your hands be atoned for."

"But, my good young man," cried the Austrian, half-laughing, "what have *I* to say to your injuries? the delinquent is one of a sex we all regard too tenderly to dream of taking vengeance upon. Consult the past—you will see that I am perfectly innocent in the matter. It is getting late, or rather early; a fair lady awaits my coming, also a supper. To-morrow, when you are more calm, we can talk this over again."

"Not to-morrow, nor any other time, but now, *now*, this instant. Understand me, Prince, you must fight me to-night—I am determined."

There was a desperate resolve in the artist's whole attitude, in the white fixity of his face, in the watchful glare of his eye, that gave full weight to his words. The Prince surveyed him with a glance that was not without a comical appreciation of the dilemma, and again shrugged his shoulders.

"You shall fight me," said Steven passionately, thrusting his pallid face close to him with the

determined insolence of one bent on provocation; "scoundrel, coward, destroyer of peaceful homes, foul beast preying upon innocence and weakness, if to-night I am destined to revenge with my own wrong that of the many poor trusting souls that owe their ruin to you, I shall leave this accursed place feeling that I have done a good deed by mankind in ridding the world of such a brute; and if my arm should falter, the thought of that little country-woman of mine, miserable, ignorant, foolish child, driven from her place in disgrace, sick to death of her shame within those walls yonder, who, not a month ago, before she knew you, was a happy, honest girl—the thought of this lost creature, I say, would lend me strength to strike."

A low whistle broke from the Prince's lips; a new light seemed to dawn upon him.

"*Donnerwetter!*" he ejaculated, with soft, amused amazement, "it's about the little miss after all! *Mais comment donc*, my friend? I have been at cross purposes with you, then, all this time. Ah! if it's on account of the little miss, it's quite another affair. Desolated, I beg you to believe, to have interfered with you, but it was quite ignorantly, I assure you. Of course, I do not for a moment dispute your right to resent my attentions in that quarter, but, with due allowance for your feelings, my good sir, this midnight ambush, your informal little programme, *au clair de la lune*, is very picturesque no doubt, and would make an excellent effect in a comic opera, but is hardly practical in real life. In any case, it is not how we are accustomed to act in civilised countries. We place these matters in the

hands of friends, and leave it to them to decide whether it be for our honour that a meeting should take place. You will permit me the observation that, beyond your undoubted gift for painting, I know nothing of you. Nevertheless, if you will appoint a fit person to call on me to-morrow, I shall direct him to my second, and trust we shall be able to arrange for the little performance you so ardently desire; believe me, if it be possible, I shall put no obstacle in the way. By my faith, it was in all probability a very nice little idyll destined to end in respectable hymen that I thus unwittingly disturbed. Tut, tut! I regret, I regret; yet she was a pretty child, the little *mees*. . . .”

“Hold your foul tongue!” cried Steven violently. “I have never laid eyes on the wretched being; I have no interest in her, no more reason to espouse her cause than any other honest man in Rome. But for all that, you shall not escape my vengeance to-night. It has added tenfold to the ignominy of the insults heaped on me that they should come through such a degraded being as you. Once more, sir, you shall fight me, or submit to be treated as we in England treat those who have deserved such chastisement at our hands.”

He dropped his sword, balled his strong hands, and disengaged them from the sleeves with a gesture as meaning as it was instinct with science and power. This time the Prince momentarily displayed both anger and perturbation. He divested himself of his ponderous cloak, picked up one of the weapons, and placed himself in an attitude of defence with extraordinary agility.

"Your behaviour is infamous!" he exclaimed, in a brutal voice, very different from the ordinary bland perfection of his address; "you force me to inform you in so many words that people of my class do not as a rule fight duels with people of yours, and if I fight you it is in mere self-defence."

"If that be your last objection," retorted Steven, laughing aloud, returning, as he saw the moment of his vengeance at hand, to his first state of excited hilarity, "I am glad to be able to remove it. On no throne in Europe, at this moment, is there a man who can boast of better blood than mine. Come on, sir! you perchance brag of your sixteen quarterings; may it comfort you now to know that you oppose them to one who can trace back his race as chiefs of their land for over twelve centuries?"

The Prince interrupted the young man's impetuous speech with a frank burst of laughter. "Pray, pray," he interposed, "do not overwhelm me, or the thought of the augustness of your person and the honour you are conferring upon me will quite unnerve me. Why, then, since it must be—let it be Come on, young chief, I am ready."

His loss of self-control was past; he was once more the same courteous, dignified personality as ever. With a noble bearing and a cool determined air, he took his stand, betraying in every movement as much the practised swordsman as Steven's first headlong assault gave testimony of the reverse.

For a few seconds the tranquil garden resounded to the sharp beating of the combatants' blades. Prince

Schwarzenheim, firm on his feet and admirably composed, kept himself strictly on the defensive, parrying with precision his adversary's furious slashes and thrusts, warily anticipative of the moment when the young man's untutored attack would leave him open to some disabling but not too dangerous cut.

But Steven's violence, his absolute recklessness of personal danger, his total ignorance itself of the experience-born conventionalities of fence, carried the field—as it often happens in such cases—even against the skill and deliberation of his opponent. A sudden vicious thrust from the shoulder (in direct defiance of all the canons of the art, but so powerful as to break through the elder man's guard as though it had been of straw) and Steven beheld his enemy, all at once, roll over like a sack on his back, his legs stretched out, his weapon falling away from his nerveless clasp.

At the sight of the prostrate form, the sort of obsession of rage and vengeance vanished from the artist's mind, leaving him deadly cold, both physically and mentally. It must be remembered that Steven Munro was very young. For a second or two he stood blankly staring at his victim. What had he done? had he killed the man? He could not tell, but in his heart he dreaded it with a great dismay. He was not of the stuff of which duellists are made, after all.

A reflective voice issuing from the recumbent figure, and apparently directed to the sky, here fell upon his ear, bringing so great a relief that, in his gratitude to the Prince for not being killed, he well-nigh lost sight of his hatred of him.

“The Italians are right, I see,” said the supposed corpse contentedly; “in fighting, *Chi para busca; chi tira tocca!* Had I attacked, this would not have happened.” Then the speaker raised himself to a sitting posture, and began gingerly to feel his right arm. “H’m, clean through the fleshy part—unpleasant, but nothing serious. *Diable!* young man, you are the most disgusting swordsman I have ever come across. Are you not ashamed—you, a man of such chivalrous blood—to know so little of the gentlemanly science?”

With an effort he regained his feet as he spoke, holding out his right hand dripping darkly in the moonlight with the blood that ran down his arm. “May this innocent fluid have had at least the desired effect and washed away your injuries according to your amiable wish,” he went on cheerfully; “in any case, you will observe that it is out of the question I could hold a weapon again for some time. *Allons*, Mr. Munro! the end of this foolish episode is to be quite in keeping with the rest of it, it seems; I am bleeding like a pig, you see, and must beg for your assistance as far as the lodge yonder, where I shall have my arm bound up, be able to get a glass of wine, and despatch some one first with a little note to my fair hostess—who by this time, I dare say, has wisely given me up—and then for my carriage. I am not much hurt, but this loss of blood always makes one a little queer. Thanks; my arm across your shoulder thus—it is perfect. The porter has an extremely handsome daughter, as perhaps you know, a fine specimen of the large, ox-eyed, Madonna-faced Roman type; we are on

fairly good terms, la Maria and I, and it will not be altogether a hardship to find myself under her care for a couple of hours. A thousand thanks; may I trouble you to complete your good services by hammering at the door and ringing the bell until you have aroused the inmates? They cannot yet be very sound asleep, as the Duchessa returned but an hour or so ago. Hold, there is a light moving; the beautiful Maria, I make no doubt. Now, my good friend, we must concoct some little story of an accident; needless to rack our brains to explain too much—a few gold pieces will fill up all seeming discrepancies. Ah (lapsing into Italian), my fair child! do not be frightened, it is I, Prince Schwarzenheim; I have come to beg for your hospitality and kind offices for a little while; I am wounded—an accident which I will tell you about by-and-by; you will succour me, will you not? you could not turn me from your doors to bleed to death on the road? No, I will not so misjudge your tender heart! Receive the expression of my eternal gratitude, my dear Mr. Munro, for your timely ministrations; without you, what would have become of me? No, you need not fear to leave me in the keeping of my gentle friend here: I will trespass on your courtesy no longer. *Au revoir*, Signor Painter. My dear Maria, your help. Ah! who would have thought this pretty arm combined such beauty with such strength. . . .”

The remainder of his sentence was lost to Steven as the speaker tottered into the house with some exaggeration of weakness, leaning affectionately on the shoulder of the startled girl, in whom bewilderment,

however, was soon lost in a tide of feminine compassion.

“And this,” said the artist, as he turned away, “is the being whose life I first thirsted for and afterwards trembled to have taken! Let him live or die, he is not worth a moment’s thought. Faugh, I am covered with his blood!” And he went back to the fighting ground to fetch his antagonist’s cloak.

The Duchess was walking up and down her boudoir in a very decided bad temper. She had exchanged the gorgeous costume, in which she had been the very queen of the night’s revels, for one of her favourite loose wrappers of silk and lace. She had spent sufficient time over her toilet to feel sure that art had done its utmost to throw into proper relief all the loveliness of which Nature had been so unwontedly lavish. She had satisfied herself that nothing was wanting to the exquisite little supper-table that stood just at the proper distance from the merry wood fire, flanked by two inviting elbow-chairs; she had dismissed all the servants save Eulalia, and then she had sat down to wait to be amused.

And she had waited: with patience a quarter of an hour, with impatience twenty minutes, with fury three-quarters of an hour. What impertinence, what insulting presumption! He should smart for this! Fat, bald, odious wretch, he should pay for it as dearly as all those who dared to offend Anna

Castelcapaccio sooner or later paid for their folly! For to other attributes the Duchess added a long memory, a determined will, and a conscience well under control.

Ah! at length sounds of a man's tread on the stairs, now in the passage, preceded by Eulalia's genteel tiptoe advance.

"How loud and assuredly he steps, this sleek and insinuating personage—so much tender thought for my reputation to tramp thus into my house, at dawn, like a dragoon. Bah! what *rôle* other than that of court buffoon does the fool think I meant to assign to him by this night's freak? And yet he walks as if he were master here."

The door opened gently, was gently closed, and the firm feet strode a little way into the room and stopped short.

Without deigning to look in his direction, the Duchess spoke in a brief, strident voice, curiously unlike her usual dulcet drawl.

"You are too late; I am tired; go away."

Silence for the space of some twenty seconds.

"Do you hear me, Prince?" said the lady sharply, rising as she spoke, and turning vehemently round upon her visitor.

With haggard, triumphant face, with eyes red and fierce; dark, slender, menacing, stood a very different presence from that of the comely, handsome figure she had expected to see.

"My God, what is this?" she screamed, and fell back white and trembling on her chair.

Still with the same awful dumbness, the intruder now threw off the heavy cloak that enveloped him.

The Duchess turned faint and sick. She had few weaknesses. But a nameless, nervous horror of blood, and an abject dread of physical pain, were among these; she put her hand to her throat.

"There is *blood* upon you," she whimpered; "oh, this is horrible!"

"It is not mine," said Steven, coming close to her, and looking down at her with pitiless eyes and pitiless smile. "This blood is not mine," thrusting out his red hand towards her so brutally that, had it not been for her disgusted recoil, it must have touched her; "these drops flowed from a far more elegant source than the poor artist can boast of. You look frightened; reassure yourself; your lover is not dead; to slay vermin is not my vocation."

Anger came to the woman's assistance. Gathering her shaking limbs together, the colour returning with a rush to her face:

"This is monstrous, this is of the last infamy," she cried. "Whatever brings you here, Mr. Munro, I have not the smallest desire to discover, but"—stepping agitatedly across the room—"thank God, it will not take long to rid me of your presence—my servants are strong."

She reached for the bell, but Steven in a stride had followed her, and she was once more forced to draw back from the abomination of his outstretched bloody hand.

"No," arresting the shriek on her wide-open mouth by the intensity of his low-voiced passion, "you shall not call for help either; you are in my power now—take heed how you provoke me. I am not in a mood to be patient with you. You will

do well, therefore, to submit quietly to the inevitable."

Obedient to his gesture, she cowered into a chair, watching him as he sat down in front of her, with staring, terror-stricken eyes, and a face, suddenly old, and lined, and unbeautiful with the stamp of her cringing fear upon it.

"Every dog has his day," he went on, in a bantering tone, placing himself in such a position that she could not move without touching him, while the steady glare of his eyes never wavered in its command of her magnetised gaze. "You have had yours—excuse the ungallantry of the simile—it is my turn now. You have had your sport, madame, and exquisitely humorous it was, no doubt. You made a fool of a poor devil of a painter, went out of your way—even risked what women call their reputation—to do so. Anyhow you took a good deal of trouble to turn my head. It is almost flattering to reflect upon, really. You saw that at first I was untouched by your charms, heard my faith was elsewhere pledged; this it was which probably gave the zest to the proceedings for you; it is such a delightful joke to make a man behave dishonourably and break his word! Having attained your end, you insulted me, using as your witness a degraded *roué*, one whose name is associated with deeds so shameful that it is an ill thing for an honest man even to mention it. So far so good—that is your part of the game. Now comes mine."

He moved his chair an inch nearer, and paused for a moment, then continued, with a fresh assumption of light-heartedness, which could not, however, conceal

the increase of his anger, the ferocity of his bitterness :

“ Shall I tell you what happened when you came and taunted me to-day in my own room ? My first impulse was to strangle you both. You first, the Prince afterwards. I had the strength of ten men. I could have done it there and then. What kept me back I cannot tell ; an Englishman’s innate *mauvaise honte*, I suppose. My next thought was suggested by *this*. You made a mistake when you placed it on your money to-day.” He drew the dagger from his bosom, its sharp point gleaming as he balanced it in his hand, a bunch of wet papers, stained of a sinister hue, hanging limply over its hilt. “ You look pale, madame. These late hours are trying. I will not keep you much longer. This weapon which I now hold was handed down to me from my forefathers. It has been used many and many a time, but never without accomplishing its purpose. There is a tradition that a pleasant old ancestor of mine having unwittingly wedded the daughter of a clan with which he was at deadly feud, therewith cut the throats of both wife and child, when, somewhat late in the day, he discovered his mistake. Yes, we come of a vindictive race. Such is the blood that flows in my veins : you can readily understand that the sight of this heirloom did not tend to make it flow more calmly. . . . I took it up in my hand, *so* ; I stabbed the bank-notes through and through, *so*—those notes, just payment for honest toil, but with which you contrived to offer insult to the honour of Steven Munro !”

His voice broke off hoarsely ; he rose and towered above her, and looked down on her with a terrible

threat in his eyes. "Then, madame, I went over to that picture of you, which I had wrought so like to you that I could have almost sworn you were there in flesh and blood before me, and then I cut you across the face—like this—that your beauty should fool no man again."

The steel blade flashed blindingly before her, as, in fearful proximity to her face, it described a rapid cross in the air.

With a yell of fear she flung herself at his feet, and clasped them with frenzied hands:

"Ah, not that! not that! mercy, mercy!"

He pushed her from him violently.

"Get up," he cried.

But she crawled back to him, as you may see a beaten hound cower to his master's knee, and kissed his feet, and twined her arms round him, pouring forth her anguished pleading in a voice which terror had robbed of all sound save a ghastly whisper.

"Oh, my God! what shall I do? oh, have pity—spare me! I sinned against you! I ask your pardon—humbly, humbly! In the name of God, don't do that! Are you not revenged enough? Spare a wretched woman at your mercy! I will be your slave, I will do what you will, but spare me! Do not do *that!*"

What an abject heap of quaking flesh it was! what a poor white face! what white, dry lips futilely moistened by that babbling, stammering tongue! what a spectacle of womanhood degraded!

The murderous glare suddenly faded from Steven's eyes, the unholy craving for revenge from his face.

"Get up," he said once more, and threw his dagger on the table.

He felt shame of her shame, shame of his own manhood for its revenge on a woman, shame for the fearful temptation he had so nearly yielded to.

"It is time this ridiculous scene should end," he said wearily. "I thought to kill your lover, and when he lay helpless at my feet I could not, despicable though he be. I thought to punish you as you deserve, and again I cannot! Get up, for God's sake, and control yourself. You have nothing to fear from me. It is not in me, after all, to kill a fallen enemy or strike a woman."

She stumbled to her feet, and looked at him, bewildered; then, reading in his countenance that all danger was indeed over, tottered to a chair and burst into a passion of tears.

He waited in mute, scornful, unpitied patience till the first paroxysm was over, gradually resuming possession of himself; then, in an icy tone:

"Pray try and command yourself sufficiently to listen to me," he said; "I shall be glad to relieve you of my presence, and doubtless you as ardently desire my departure; there is but one little formality necessary before we reach this satisfactory consummation. It is that you take back these notes."

She screamed faintly, and started in dismay from the dagger he once more held out to her. But the silent command of eye and hand was too stern to be disregarded. Shuddering with horror, with nerveless fingers that scarce could accomplish the task, she drew the blood-marked notes from the blade. Then dropping them with a convulsion of loathing, crushed

her hands into her draperies to hide their hideous stains from view, and throwing her head back on the cushions of her chair, sobbed helplessly like a child.

“During that little supper you did me the honour to partake of at my rooms some weeks ago, madame,” said the man quietly, taking up his hat as he spoke, and spurning the Prince’s cloak from his path, “I recollect your telling me that you were at a loss for a new sensation, adding, in a very complimentary manner, that I had furnished you with one. Your subsequent behaviour has led me to believe that you were still on the research for novelty in that particular. I flatter myself I have again supplied the want—this time in a manner that will last you for some time.”

He turned to go, and had taken two steps towards the door when an inarticulate cry from the Duchess arrested him. She had half risen from her seat. Her tears had stopped; there was a singular wistful look in her eyes; she stretched out her arms:

“Steven!” she cried, in a strange tone of pleading.

He wheeled round and looked at her. And under the ineffable contempt of that glance even her shameless eyes fell.

* * * * *

Outside, dawn was bursting into beautiful day. The sun was rising in crimson and purple, amber and gold and silver; indescribable was the wealth of colours stretching across the wide skies. And in the west there were translucent greens and exquisite opal tints melting into the sapphire blue of the vault above. Every dewdrop in the garden reflected a little glory

of many-hued light. There rose from the flower-starred space a medley of rich perfumes. The ilex trees stood out black against the brilliant horizon, the hills were all radiant, Rome lay like a transfigured dream-city under the glamorous rays.

Yet, as Steven stood still a moment, and gazed around him, his soul sickened with a deadly nausea.

Oh, for the mists, the moors, the heather, the pure, healthy, honest, cold breath of his native land! His heart bounded with a sudden yearning that brought the tears to his eyes.

“I have passed through the fire,” he murmured; “but I can still look my child-bride in the eyes. Home, home and Maimie! Yes, yes, my darling, I am coming!”

CHALONER'S BEST MAN.

I.

From Edward Chaloner to Colonel Hythe.

Lutcombe, Devon, Dec. 10.

DEAR OLD GERRY,—Don't roar! I am going to be married; and that to the nicest girl under the sun, and the prettiest into the bargain. Of course you are groaning over me, and swearing at me, and calling me a fool and a victim, and all the rest of it. I can see you at it from here, old fellow. But, for all your rooted ideas on the subject, you may believe me when I tell you that I am the luckiest man alive, and would not change places with anyone in the world.

And now, if you have not already guessed who the young lady is, you are not so sharp as I take you to be; for though you never met Miss Prade, it is not my fault if her name is not pretty familiar to you by this time. You know I have loved her for years—ever since I first saw her. You know she is the only girl I ever really cared for.

Congratulate me, old boy; I can scarcely believe my own good fortune. I dare say you will laugh at me, but I must tell you we have been engaged nearly three months already, and I never dared write to anyone about it before, lest something should happen to prevent the marriage. *Now*, however, it is fixed for the 21st, so there can be no mistake about it, thank goodness! though it seems too good to be true. We

are to be married from here, her brother-in-law's house; Marie lives with them, you know, being an orphan. He is the best fellow in the world, and has splendid shooting.

And now I am coming to the point of my letter. *Will you be my best man?* There is not another fellow in England—or anywhere else, for the matter of that—I'd sooner have than you, old chappie. You have always been the dearest chum I ever had.

Ever yours, most sincerely,

EDWARD DUFFUS CHALONER.

P.S.—Holmes, her brother-in-law, you know, will put you up. Come as soon as you can.

From Colonel Hythe to Edward Chaloner.

Guards' Club, 15th.

DEAR OLD DUFFER,—I accept invitation to accompany you to execution, and feel a painful pleasure in being able to render you the last service in my power. I am rejoiced everything appears to you in so superlative a light. Hope it will last out the honeymoon. Glad, anyhow, the young lady is an orphan; glad also of brother-in-law's good shooting. I shall turn up on the 19th to assist in tying up the noose. Shall I bring my gun? Best wishes to you, and pray give my congratulations to the young lady on having succeeded in potting the 'best fellow in the world.'

Yours,

GERALD.

P.S.—Wasn't Miss Prade's mother a Russian, and isn't there a proverb about Russians and Tartars? This is merely a suggestion.

“Confound the fellow!” said Colonel Hythe to himself, as the train sped along through the raw evening air. “Couldn’t he be married at another time of year; couldn’t he have got another fellow to play the fool behind him in church; couldn’t he remain a bachelor? I do hate a man who doesn’t know when he is well off. I really am the most good-natured creature—to think of my taking this infernal journey in such weather all to satisfy a sentimental feeling about that old ass, Ned. Poor Ned!—the Duffer, as we used to call him—I believe I have a soft corner in my heart for him, after all. He was always the same—always the greatest noodle—from the time he could walk alone, perpetually in some scrape or other. I suppose I have helped to pull him out of a dozen at least. Ah, well! he’s been and gone and done it this time. Can’t pull him out of this, and more’s the pity. Another good man gone wrong. She has nabbed him, of course. Those girls have the talent of scenting the tin, and running it down, too—15,000*l.* a year and the finest place in Hampshire are not to be picked up every day. She has played her cards well, too, by Jove! The poor devil thinks she has done him the greatest favour in life by consenting to spend his money for him. Poor Ned! Poor old Duffer! He was always a good creature at heart—better than any of us—but that is the way of the world; it’s the best that go first.”

Colonel Hythe was growing vague; his cigar slipped from his fingers, his eyelids drooped over his handsome eyes, his head began to bob with placid non-resistance to the jerking and jolting of the carriage. Presently a gentle snort escaped at

intervals from his well-shaped nose, and Colonel Hythe slept.

With a despairing yell the train slackened speed ; a hideous grating of brakes ensued, lights flashed into the window, houses leaped up on each side like a legion of Jack-in-the-boxes, the engine halted with a great spouting-out of steam before a little red-brick station, and an aged porter emitted several totally unintelligible shouts. Yet Colonel Hythe slept on.

A dark, agitated countenance appeared at the window of his carriage, the door was opened with frenzied haste, a voice called on him in tones of anguish—

“Monsieur, monsieur ! Our station, monsieur ! For the love of God, awake !”

And Gerald Hythe, thus abjured, opened two wrathful eyes in time to see his French valet, nearly black in the face—an already sufficiently dusky one—with the combined efforts of shrieking at him and struggling to pull the portmanteau over the barrier of his outstretched legs, in time to feel its sharpest corner land on his favourite toe, and to become aware beneath him of the first faint outward movement of the again departing train.

With one energetic sweep of his arm he sent Leclerc spinning on to the platform, in another instant the portmanteau followed suit, and the third saw the gallant Colonel emerge with more haste than dignity from the carriage ; escaping, at the imminent peril of life and limb, the fate of being carried away into the heart of Cornwall.

“Confound your fussiness !” exclaimed he, with great indignation and a sublime disregard of justice,

scowling at his discomfited attendant; "I've lost my best stick now. Really, Leclerc, you get worse and worse every day."

After which outburst he felt sufficiently relieved to be able to make inquiries of the station-master as to the possibilities of a conveyance with a tolerable amount of civility. His long-suffering valet meanwhile murmured abject apologies, readjusted his disordered attire, and the instant his master's broad back was turned, sent a murderous look and an inward malediction of the most sulphurous description after him, thereby deriving much moral satisfaction at having re-established the equilibrium of things.

Then a loud cheery voice rang out from the unsavoury little waiting-room :

"Gerry, old man, this *is* jolly!" and a shortish, stoutish, pinkish young man, of the retreating-chin, prominent-eye type, came running forward with great impetuosity, two tightly yellow-gloved hands outstretched, and a beaming smile broadly distending his ingenuous countenance.

Colonel Hythe smiled in return, but spasmodically. He was not up to "gush" just then.

"Ah! Chaloner!" he remarked, with a distinct absence of enthusiasm, and delivered one limp hand to the other's rapturous grasp.

"I've got the dogcart for you, old chappie; your fellow can go behind, and I'll bowl you over the ground in double-quick time. I hope you're well wrapped up; it's the bitterest night we have had yet."

The Colonel groaned.

Anyone with a grain of sense would have a

brougham for him—a covered fly even—in such weather and at such an hour. But what could one expect? It was the “Duffer” all over.

He entered the vehicle provided for him in Spartan silence, Leclere scrambled up behind, their luggage was hauled in, and off they went, the mare scrambling and sprawling on the slippery road.

“The fastest goer,” said Ned, “in all the country.”

The Colonel grunted. The wind was blowing up his sleeves and down his neck, and finding out every weak corner of his anatomy. At any rate, it should not have the chance of penetrating to his lungs.

Ned, nothing abashed, babbled on garrulously of his happiness, his bride, his prospects.

Lights appeared in the far distance.

“The village,” said Ned, interrupting his discourse and pointing at their glimmering with his whip.

“Hang the village!” thought Colonel Hythe.

They turned a corner so sharply as seriously to imperil the triumvir’s equilibrium. The mare was undoubtedly fast, but she had likewise an unpleasant tendency to take every corner at a rush, and graze it if possible. The Colonel could hear Leclere’s teeth chattering with cold, and feel him squirming in unconscious and futile efforts to ease the swaying cart.

Two great gates suddenly broke the monotony of the high bleak wall they were skirting. Ned pulled up before them and hulloaed wildly, at the same time elaborately explaining: “The Lodge!”

Of course the mare went for it with a bounce, and did her best to catch the off-wheel on the kerbstone. A broken prayer escaped Leclere’s lips. They whirled past close-growing trees, silhouettes of cattle, and

hanging mists that wreathed over dim hollows; there was a homely, pleasant sound of crunching of gravel after the ring of the hard road; a great square building, studded with lights, loomed all at once before them, as if risen out of the night.

"The house," said Ned. And, "Thank God!" said Colonel Hythe.

"I say, Gerry," here observed Mr. Chaloner, rather nervously, and moderating the pace of the mare to allow him time to say his say before arriving, a procedure which infinitely disgusted the half-frozen Colonel; "I say, Gerry, you mustn't mind if Marie" (he pronounced it Mawry) "seems to you just a little odd in her manner at first. She is apt to strike strangers so, sometimes, you know, so—ah—I thought I'd just tell you, don't you know, lest you shouldn't understand it. I like her all the better for it myself," Ned went on hurriedly. ("Nothing when you are used to it, I suppose," murmured Gerald, in a none too amiable *sotto voce*.) "But just in the beginning, when you don't know her, you might get a wrong impression of her. She is really the best-tempered girl in the world."

"Really," said Colonel Hythe. Now there was something in his tone which Ned did not relish. For he coloured very much in the darkness, and relapsing suddenly into silence, gathered up the reins so sharply that the mare landed them with a rush and a scuttle before the hall door.

It opened on the instant, as if by magic. A solemn butler appeared on the threshold; a brisk young footman precipitated himself on the travellers. A pale, brown-bearded man received the Colonel, as Ned

ushered him noisily into the hall, with a solemn handshake.

Then a great laughing and chattering in a high feminine key was heard rapidly approaching from a little distance, and a short, plump, fair woman waddled out to them—a ceaseless stream of voluble inquiries and ecstatic giggles flowing from her lips—and seized the Colonel's hand with fervour in her own two fat white ones.

“*How* do you do, Colonel Hythe? So glad to see you. Was it very *cold*? Are you *dreadfully* tired? *Isn't* it an awful night? Won't you come into the *library* and have a cup of *tea*?”

This was Mrs. Holmes; the tall, silent man was Mr. Holmes; the small flat-faced boy peeping at him from between the latter's legs was Master Holmes.

Colonel Hythe took a violent dislike to the whole family on the spot. He hated people who hadn't a word to throw to a fellow; he hated people who rushed at one and talked nineteen to the dozen and italicised their words; he hated small boys with round staring eyes.

He felt his nose was flaming after the cold drive, he knew he was grimy, unkempt, not fit for ladies' society, and he was glad the unknown Miss Prade was not there to see him in such plight.

Mrs. Holmes's offers of refreshment he declined with elaborate courtesy, wondering in his own mind if “*Mawry*” were like her, and at his request was ushered to his room by the devoted and ever-ready Ned. The latter was bubbling all over with such superfluous affection and rapture, and was altogether so irrepressible and trying to the Colonel in his then

condition of irritation, that he was forced to expel him from his presence with a severity which would have been calculated to cast a damper over anyone but the "Duffer."

A hot bath, a luxurious shave under Leclerc's skilled fingers (who, as he was wont to say himself, had the true instinct of the art), the consciousness that the colour had retreated from the tip of his fine straight nose, and that there could not be two opinions about the cut of his clothes—that, altogether, he was not looking his worst—went a fair way to restore the Colonel's equanimity. Leclerc had also imparted to him his impression that the cook would prove passable, and Leclerc's impressions on such matters were apt to turn out correct. This was a more cheering prospect than he had allowed himself to indulge in. Gerald Hythe was thirty-four, an age when a man's dinner begins to assume a considerable amount of importance in everyday life.

The gong clamoured through the house just as the dapper little Frenchman withdrew his hands with a flourish from under his master's chin, and contemplated the irreproachable bow of cambric he had just completed with a glow of triumph irradiating his countenance. He had surpassed himself to-night.

The hungry Colonel ran down-stairs, nothing loth to obey the welcome summons. Pulling up his collar and pulling down his cuffs, after the approved style, he entered the library to which the sedate butler motioned him with a majestic wave of his arm. Here were assembled, awaiting him, his host gloomy and gentlemanly, his hostess as plump as a quail in her tight grey satin gown, and Ned red and uneasy,

though obviously struggling to be cheerful and conceal the anxious glances he kept throwing from side to side in the vain search for someone who was nowhere to be seen.

"We shall not wait for my sister-in-law," said Mr. Holmes severely. "Colonel Hythe, will you give your arm to my wife?"

Colonel Hythe obeyed, wondering why so trifling a matter as a young lady's inexactitude should cast such a gloom over the little party. He was beginning to feel curious about the person in question, and unconsciously fell into Ned's way of watching the door the while he partook of excellent soup and answered somewhat at random Mrs. Holmes's incessant babble.

The fish had just been placed before his host, a cod's head and shoulders of gigantic size, reposing on a very stiff white napkin, when the door was opened petulantly, and, with a good deal of rustle and bustle, a very small and slender girl came into the room.

Ned grew purple, and sprang up to meet her, Mrs. Holmes poured forth a volume of queries, laments, and reproaches, intermingled with perfectly irrelevant bursts of laughter; Miss Prade did not pay the least attention to either of them.

"Soup, please," she cried, in a ringing voice to the butler, who was hovering behind Mr. Holmes—plate in hand, awaiting fish—and sat down calmly in the place reserved for her, beside her lover.

On Colonel Hythe she did not bestow even a glance; a treatment, however, he did not regret, as it enabled him to examine her critically, unobserved himself.

What a quaint, original little face it was, and how

bewitchingly wicked! Nothing of the regular statuesque style of beauty about her—far from it. There was a certain flatness of cheekbone—Calmuck, as he told himself—the eyes were too long and narrow, the nose too short, the lips too full. But what colouring, what hair, how bright the grey-green eyes, how attractive the strange and intense mobility of the whole countenance!

“That little girl,” he thought, “is just the sort to drive a man mad.”

And the more he watched her, the stronger there came upon him an indescribable feeling which seemed to partake both of fascination and antipathy.

“Marie,” suddenly interposed Mrs. Holmes, mindful of her duties, “let me introduce Colonel Hythe.”

The Colonel bowed low and ceremoniously over his plate. The girl gave him a direct bold look from her narrow eyes, and a little abrupt nod that was full of impudence.

“No doubt,” said Gerald, in his most graceful way “you are aware of the responsible duty I have promised to undertake for Ned yonder.”

“Oh yes, I know,” answered Miss Marie promptly; “you promised to attend his execution, and have the painful pleasure of rendering him the last service in your power.”

Colonel Hythe positively gaped, while to say that Ned blushed would be totally inadequate language to describe the series of hues his countenance assumed; Mr. Holmes stared straight before him with the look of a man who is determined not to be surprised at *anything*; Mrs. Holmes gave one of her extraordinary crows of laughter to hide the confusion she felt.

Gerald was the first to recover from the effects of the shock.

"It was not fair of Ned," he said reproachfully, gazing at the unfortunate young man, now choking in his champagne glass, "to show you my poor confidential scrawl; I am quite at your mercy, but I trust you will remember I had not yet *seen* you."

To his amused chagrin, the subtle and delicate compliment intended to be conveyed by these words was totally lost on Miss Prade, who immediately rejoined carelessly, "He did not show it to me; he left it about, and I read it. I wanted to see if his friends were like himself."

To the dullest among them—save, indeed, the bridegroom elect himself—it was most embarrassingly obvious that the young lady's opinion of the gallant officer would not have been a high one had she discovered the resemblance in question.

"Mary," said Mr. Holmes, in a warning bass, and holding the fish-slice aloft in a threatening manner, "will you have some cod?"

Marie glanced at the boiled denizen of the sea, and for a moment her eyes remained glued to its melancholy jowl as if attracted by some horrible fascination. Then a gleam of wicked amusement lit up the whole piquant little face; she looked swiftly at Chaloner, and from his amiable inane countenance, with goggle eyes just now staring dully before him, and receding chin dropping back from the gaping mouth, once again to the flabby head on the dish.

Colonel Hythe was watching her manœuvres with some curiosity; the meaning of them now flashed across him. Great heavens! yes, he saw it too.

There was undoubtedly an absurd, grotesque resemblance between the cod's head and Ned's. He always was deucedly ugly, poor old chap.

Marie gave an affected shiver. "No, thank you," she said, with emphasis, and curled up her little nose with an irresistibly humorous expression.

Gerald could not repress a smile; he alone had followed her little by-play; involuntarily their eyes met with mutual understanding. Then instantly feeling hideously disloyal, he endeavoured to compose his features into an expression of rigid severity, and to look as if he did not understand what she meant.

"What a pity," said Mrs. Holmes, in the pause that ensued on this incident, to cover the delay which as usual preceded the appearance of the first *entrée*, "that Ned is no longer in the army. It would have been quite charming if he could have worn his uniform on Wednesday, and had his men all up the church, and all that sort of thing, wouldn't it? I always think it makes a wedding look so pretty."

"Yes," cried Ned, with good-humoured acquiescence, "and then Gerry could have sported his V.C. and all the rest of it, and I should have felt so proud of the dear old boy."

Miss Prade pricked up her ears with sudden sparkling interest, and looked hard at the Colonel.

"Has *he* got the Victoria Cross?" she asked quickly.

"Rather," cried Chaloner, with generous enthusiasm, and forthwith launched into a most gushing account of his friend's prodigies of valour, not only

dwelling on the especial feat which won him that most distinguished of all distinctions, but likewise all his other exploits which deserved quite as much notice but did not get it.

With all an Englishman's horror of such a situation, the Colonel pished and pshawed and poohed, and telegraphed frantic signals across the table in the vain endeavour of silencing his indiscreet eulogist.

His confusion was increased by the unwinking stare Mr. Holmes fixed on him during the whole narrative, and the imbecile encomiums with which Mrs. Holmes interlarded it, and in which, at its conclusion, she positively wallowed.

Miss Prade listened to her lover in attentive silence, and abstained from making any comment on his eloquent account, beyond the sharp query she addressed to him, as he stopped quite breathless—

“How is it *you* haven't got any medals?” To which Ned, somewhat taken aback, answered deprecatingly that he had never been into action. He had come into his property only two years after he had joined, and was thus obliged to resign before having a chance of seeing any service.

“Oh!” said Miss Prade, with biting scorn and truly feminine inconsistency. And then she turned her eyes once more on the Colonel, and once more their looks met.

Now, he was not a vain man, nor an imaginative one, but it was apparent to him that the young lady's *réséda*-coloured orbs betrayed a great deal more warmth than he was entitled to; and, though it was undeniably pleasant, he would not allow himself to

return the compliment, for, as he remarked internally, if he were Ned he certainly wouldn't like to catch her looking at another fellow like that.

He tried to think it was a relief when she left the dining-room; but for all that, Ned's platitudes seemed more intolerable than ever, and the great oak dining-room to have grown quite dark without the bright, mischievous face.

"What a little devil it is," he soliloquised over his wine, "and what a fate lies in store for Ned. The girl hates him already, as anyone can see; Heaven only knows how it will turn out. Poor, dull fellow, one can't help feeling sorry for him. The idea of his attempting to chain that brilliant butterfly creature to his side! I fear me," thought the Colonel in a high moral strain, "it is destined to be one of those unhappy unions—alas! too common—which end so fatally after a few years of conjugal misery. When a girl sells herself for money, how can anyone expect her to keep straight as a wife? It is a criminal state of society."

The three were not very sociable as they sat sipping their claret round the board. Their host never talked, Colonel Hythe was not inclined for conversation, even Ned could not discourse for ever unencouraged. A deep silence fell on them, and no one was sorry when, after a due interval, a move to the drawing-room was originated.

Now, it was a very strange thing that, the instant he entered the room, the Colonel became aware of Miss Prade's absence, and still stranger the feeling of keen disappointment that came over him in consequence. Ned looked round forlornly, and then in

piteous inquiry at Mrs. Holmes, who shrugged her plump shoulders and rolled her eyes in cheerful deprecation.

"How dare she behave like that to her future husband?" said Gerald to himself in an unreasonable outburst of righteous indignation. "It's a burning shame! it is more than rude, it's insulting to the poor fellow."

He stood, aimlessly looking at the pictures and inveighing against the girl in his own mind, when Ned came up to him and said in a whisper—

"I am awfully sorry I left that letter about; I am afraid she will never forgive you. She is so proud and sensitive, poor little thing! Of course you noticed how strange she was to-night; I believe she is really hurt, and I don't know where to look for her."

Gerald met his friend's eyes with a pang of pity and an inexplicable feeling of remorse. They might be fishy, but they were honest, true eyes for all that, and were now filled with a timid wistfulness that went to his heart.

He clapped his hand suddenly on Ned's shoulder and said cheerily, "My dear fellow, it's not your fault; it's mine, for making such a confounded ass of myself when I wrote. Never mind her not liking me. What's the odds, so long as she's fond of the right person? She's a lovely little thing, and I consider you eminently to be congratulated." It was touching to see how the "Duffer" revived under these words. Up went his spirits again to exultation point, where they remained stationary for the rest of the evening for all his wilful little mistress's persistent absence.

Mrs. Holmes retired early, to the infinite relief of Gerald, who could not accustom himself to her extraordinary volubility nor her ceaseless peals of laughter; and after a cigar her lord and master followed her example. It was a primitive household, to which eleven p.m. was the height of dissipation. Ned had evidently fallen into their ways, for, despite all his efforts and his general pleasure in the Colonel's company, he went from one yawn into another till the latter could stand it no longer and literally drove him from the field. He himself was just beginning to feel lively, and declined to move from his comfortable quarters, a decision which greatly disgusted the butler, who, having too much idea of the *convenances* to put out the gas and leave the troublesome guest to his own devices, saw himself debarred from a part of his legitimate slumbers. The Colonel never felt less inclined for his couch. A curious restlessness had taken possession of him, and for nearly an hour he wandered aimlessly about the room, unable to occupy himself with anything.

He lit one of his host's excellent cigars only to throw it away; mixed a stiff bumper of whisky and soda and left the inviting beverage untouched; turned over all the magazines and could not make up his mind which to open. He must go out for a turn, he thought at length, or he would not be able to get a wink of sleep that night.

It was very odd, but that little girl was always before his mind's eye. "It showed what slaves we are to our senses," moralised the guardsman, as he threw a cloak of Mr. Holmes's over his stalwart shoulders. "If she had been ugly, now, he would

not have thought twice of her—she certainly was the last girl in the world for Ned; a creature like that should be married to a man with a firm will, a man who could tame her. It would not be altogether unpleasant either to have the taming of the lovely little shrew.”

He caught sight of his own face in the glass as he turned to leave the room. What did that absurdly determined setting of your face mean, Gerald Hythe, and that fiercely elated gleam of your eye?

“Pshaw! What a fool a man gets at this time of night!”

He laughed angrily to himself as he hurried into the hall, seized a cap and made for a side-door which his bump of locality informed him would probably lead out of the house. It was unlocked and yielded noiselessly to the pressure of his hand.

A gush of warm air enveloped him, heavy with the intoxicating perfume of many flowers. He found himself before a vast vista of towering palms and delicate, sprawling ferns, a murmur of flowing waters fell upon his ear, the tessellated pavement under his feet was strewn with gorgeous rugs, with here and there a quaint-shaped, deep-cushioned bamboo lounge; the whole place was lighted in some cunning, invisible way from the great gas-lamps in the hall; it was beautified by every rare and exquisite exotic that can be imagined. A paradise of colouring, sweetness, and artistic construction: it seemed to the astonished Colonel like fairyland.

This was the great Lutcombe conservatory, the one interest in life of its taciturn master, and through which he had intended to marshal his guest with

due solemnity on the morrow, when the day was brightest.

"There ought to be an enchanted princess somewhere," thought Gerald, with vague reminiscence of his childish days of fairy tales, and then, advancing, he looked around involuntarily as if to seek her.

And there she was, in very truth, under the blossoming gardenia bush that sent forth such delirious gusts of fragrance into the warm, moist air.

The Colonel started and then nearly laughed aloud at himself as he saw the little white figure stretched luxuriously on the settee, the fair tossed head supported on two round white arms that gleamed at him from the green gloom, the full white lids closed in apparent slumber.

On tiptoe he crept over to her and bent down to gaze.

"The little humbug! She was foxing."

He could distinctly see the quivering shadow of the dark eyelashes on the glowing cheek, the dawning symptoms of a mischievous dimple, instantly suppressed; nay, he could hear the catch of an irresistible titter breaking the exaggerated regularity of her breathing.

He was not going to stand this. We all know the fate of sleeping princesses in fairyland.

The Colonel did not pause to think about the duties honour and friendship alike imposed on him, did not even hear his conscience warning him against staining his spotless shield by an act of flagrant disloyalty. He forgot Ned altogether in the fascination of Ned's bride, and, stooping still lower, implanted a very fervent kiss on the roguishly compressed lips so temptingly at his disposal.

But the sin was no sooner committed than swift retribution came upon him. His heart stirred within him as, in all his years of life, in all his experience of love and adventure, it had never stirred before. Good Heavens! What woman was this? Was she really enchanted, and had she cast her spell over him? And *then* he remembered Ned. She was to be married to Ned on the morrow—yes, the morrow, for even at that instant the last strokes of midnight were dying on the air—Ned, who had been his friend ever since they were boys together: poor, foolish, trusting, innocent Ned!

The perspiration started to the Colonel's brow, in the space of a minute a tumult of thoughts rushed through his mind.

How was it that the memory of those days at Eton so long ago should have come upon him now so vividly? That time when Ned took a switching for a fault of which he, Gerald, was guilty, and had the heroism not to reveal his devotion, even when the real culprit, with the brutality only one boy can show to another, taunted him with milksoppishness for crying over his punishment.

How distinctly the Colonel remembered the gush of generous feeling which had filled his heart towards the faithful little fellow when the truth was by chance revealed, and the ardent friendship they swore for each other over a bottle of ginger-beer.

His face grew very black, his conscience very reproachful, and Miss Prade, peeping at him from under her long eyelashes, thought it was getting about time to wake up.

This she did with an admirably simulated start

and look of surprise, with the most bewitching blinking of very wide-awake and watchful eyes, and stretching of the pretty bare arms aforesaid. Then she looked up at the Colonel, who was standing over her as stiff as a poker, and withal a general appearance as if he were on parade.

"I believe I have been asleep," she said, with a little, rippling laugh.

"I believe you have," answered the Colonel drily; "it's lucky I came in, or you might have slept here all night, perhaps."

"I had such lovely dreams," said Miss Prade, in a soft, low voice. After which remark there was a pause, and they went out of the dangerous fairy palace into the glaring light of the hall.

"Good-night," murmured the girl, lingeringly, extending her soft little hand, and raising her lovely eyes, filled with caressing expectancy, to his.

"Good-night," cried he precipitately, shook her loosely by the hand, and retreated a few steps.

She waited a second, watching him with ever-growing wonder and impatience; then turned on her heel petulantly, and walked upstairs with a loud tapping of small, decided feet.

The discomfited Colonel sought his own chamber so soon as Miss Prade's door, closing with a sound which closely resembled a bang, announced to the world at large that she had retired to her room. He was not at all easy in his own mind, and for a long time could not compose himself to sleep. When at length he succeeded in doing so, matters were not much improved thereby, for it was only to fall into a succession of distressing nightmares, during which

he was for ever trying to kiss a beautiful mermaid, who invariably changed into a codfish with tight yellow kid gloves so soon as his lips touched hers.

II.

THE sun was high in the heavens next morning, and the inhabitants of Lutcombe Manor had been astir for many hours, before Gerald Hythe awoke to the consciousness of a new day, and the presence of his valet standing motionless beside his bed with the matutinal cup of tea.

"A note for Monsieur," said Leclerc, in a subdued voice that could not have offended the sensibilities of the lightest sleeper.

"Pull the curtain then," growled the Colonel with muffled ferocity from his pillows. "How can I read a letter in the dark?"

In a trice the shutters were thrown back, and under Leclerc's obedient hand up flew the blinds, and a glorious flood of sunshine streamed into the room. A day to make the sorriest heart glad, one would have thought, but decidedly the Colonel was far from amenable to soothing influences this morning.

"There, there, that will do; you are blinding me with that glare!" he cried, irritably, and demanded his tea and his letter in the tone of one who is determined to have no trifling.

He took a gulp; it was very hot and burned him, and it was with some little effort he restrained the impulse to fling it at the valet's sleek head; then he seized his letter and tore it open.

It was only a sheet of paper clumsily folded; surely he knew that sprawling hand in which the few hurried lines it contained were penned. It was blotted, smudged, crumpled, and the familiar writing bore witness to as intense agitation as the words themselves.

"For heaven's sake, dear old man, let me come and speak to you. I am in terrible trouble, and don't know who to turn to.—NED."

"Monsieur Chaloner wished to come in to Monsieur more than an hour ago," here interposed Leclerc, in his cheerful way, "but I informed him that nothing short of an *incendie* or a telegram from the War Office would induce me to allow Monsieur to be disturbed before his usual time."

"Dolt! fool! idiot!" cried Monsieur, in a fury. "Bring Mr. Chaloner here instantly."

Mr. Chaloner was evidently not far off, for before Colonel Hythe had time even to examine the foreboding in his mind, the gentleman in question was pompously ushered into the room, and Leclerc, every nerve alive with curiosity, vanished with a great appearance of discretion, to listen behind the door.

Haggard, wild-eyed, bloodshot, dishevelled, poor Ned was indeed a doleful spectacle, and the Colonel stared at him in amazement as he rushed to the bedside, seized his hand, and cried out in tones of anguish:

"Oh, Gerry, old man, what shall I do? what shall I do? She says she won't marry me at all!"

"Who—what?" gasped Gerald, while his heart gave a great bound, and then seemed to turn to stone.

"It is Mawry," answered the other, piteously; "this morning at seven o'clock she came to me in the smoking-room, and told me she was determined to break it all off."

"She said," Ned went on, too full of his woes to heed his friend's strange countenance, "she said she never cared for me; but she had told me that so often before that I had got not to mind it much. And so I thought it was only a sort of scruple at the last, and tried to reason with her and tell her that I was willing to risk it; seeing I loved her so much, she would have to love me in the end, too. But then—then," said the unhappy lover, with a break in his voice, "she answered quite coolly that that was not the case in point at all, as she was about to explain to me when I interrupted her; but that she had discovered that she was in love with somebody else, and, under such circumstances, no consideration on earth would induce her to become my wife. And you know, Gerry," added he, after a pause, to allow his confidant to grasp the whole horror of the situation, "you know it *can't* be true, because you are the *only* man—except her relations and myself—she has seen for the last three months, ever since we were engaged, in fact, so she couldn't have fallen in love since as she says she has."

He sat down on the foot of the bed and looked at his friend with a world of anguish in his honest goggle eyes, while for the first time in his life the Colonel felt those very unpleasant symptoms produced by an uneasy conscience.

For the first time, too, he had a difficulty in

looking at a fellow straight in the face. He had rather not meet the eyes of "The Duffer," somehow.

"I'll not survive it," cried Ned, with a startling outburst of passion. "If I can't have her, I'll chuck up the whole thing altogether, I swear I will! I'll cut my throat."

Poor old Ned. Who ever would have thought he had it in him to feel so deeply?

"Come, come, old boy," said Gerald, in a strangled, feeble voice; "it's only a little caprice of your lady-love's, I dare say; you must not take it *au tragique*, like that. It's just a last fling before she settles down to love, honour, and obey you. You'll probably find her as mild as milk by this time."

This very lame suggestion met with the fate it deserved. Ned looked with melancholy reproach at his friend and did not deign to answer.

"Well, perhaps, after all," remarked Gerald, after a pause, speaking in a very small voice, and uneasily surveying the movements of his own restless toes under the bed-clothes, "perhaps, you know, old man, if she *is* that sort of girl, it's better to find it out before marriage than afterwards."

"Shut up!" said Ned fiercely; "you don't know what you're saying. She'd have made the best and truest wife man ever had. I know her heart. She's as true as steel and as straight as a die."

Once more there was an awkward pause, then Ned broke forth again with a fresh explosion of woe—

"Oh, Gerry, Gerry, to think it should come to this! I know I'm not fit to tie her shoe-strings;

I know I am ugly and stupid, and all the rest of it. But she would have loved me, she *must* have loved me in the end."

He brought his hand down on the bed-post with a blow that shook the whole frame. The Colonel sat up with a jerk, and stared blankly at him, inanely vibrating to the commotion of the springs beneath him.

"Hasn't Mr. Holmes any influence over her?"

"The worst," returned Ned gloomily; "she hates him. And at the first word of reproach he said to her this morning she flew at him and told him she knew he wanted to get rid of her, and that she would leave his house that day. And she means it, too. I believe she's packing now," concluded Chaloner with a groan.

"Ned, old boy. I'm heartily sorry for you. I'd give anything in the world to help you."

The genuine emotion in Gerald's voice went straight to the poor fellow's heart, and swept away his last straw of self-control.

"I knew you would, Gerry! Oh, Gerry, don't laugh at me!"

And with that the "Duffer" gave way altogether and burst into tears.

The Colonel was greatly distressed. Hang it all! why couldn't he forget that day at Eton when Ned got flogged for him? Such a little shrimp of a fellow as he was, too. He flung his long legs out of bed with a desperate resolution, and coming up to Ned, slapped him on the shoulder with an energy that nearly startled him out of his weeping.

"There, don't do that, old chap. I'll speak to

her. She shall marry you, or my name's not Gerald Hythe. You'll trust to me? Come, that is right. And now clear away and let me dress, for there's not a moment to lose."

Never in all his rich experience had Leclerc seen his master in so very bad a temper as on that memorable morning, and never had the gallant officer's toilet been so agitating a piece of work. Nevertheless, it was accomplished with unusual celerity, and in the space of barely three-quarters of an hour Gerald found himself pacing the library from end to end, every fibre on the strain to catch the sound of approaching footsteps, wondering whether the somewhat curt note he had sent Miss Prade would bring her to the rendezvous, hoping, if truth be told, that it might not.

At last there came a patter of high-heeled shoes, a rustle of silken skirts, a tempestuous bursting open of the door. What made the wilful maiden so fatally docile that day of all days in the year? Alack! Gerald knew only too well, and the knowledge did not tend to make him more comfortable.

She stood before him, radiant, smiling, expectant, her bright, bold eyes making no effort to conceal the tenderness with which they regarded him; and, for sure, those crimson lips would have expressed no disapproval of a repetition of his last night's audacity.

Gerald felt mean. How near he was at that moment to finally and altogether betraying his friend he himself never fully realised. But it was, perhaps, the very fierceness of the temptation which drove him along the path of virtue in so violent and pitiless a manner.

“Miss Prade,” said he, without giving himself time to dally with the tempter, and speaking very drily, in what may be called his orderly-room voice, “for the sake of our old friendship, I have promised Ned to speak to you, to represent to you the folly and cruelty of your proceeding, and beg you to reconsider your extraordinary decision of this morning. I say *extraordinary*,” said the Colonel, growing fiery red all of a sudden, and looking very hard at the young lady, “*extraordinary, inexplicable.*”

Miss Prade grew just a little white as he spoke, the love-light in her eyes changed to an expression quite as warm but not quite so tender, and the smile on her lips became rather too much like a grin to be very pleasant, but otherwise she never “turned a hair.”

“Let us sit down,” she said very quietly, “and I will hear anything you have to say.”

Now the Colonel had been bracing himself for a scene, for tears, reproaches—more perilous still, appeals—but this composure he had not calculated on. It took the wind out of his sails; he did not know how to meet it. Miss Prade sat down and motioned him to a chair only separated from hers by a little table. The perspiration was starting to the Colonel’s brow; he obeyed her meekly, wishing himself a hundred miles away.

“Well?” asked the girl, leaning her two arms on the table and looking at him fixedly across it.

Gerald ground his teeth. He was not going to turn back at the cannon’s mouth and lose his reputation for ever. Not he. He took the lead once more, boldly.

"You see, Miss Prade," he said, "you are treating poor Ned in a way that is downright dishonourable."

Here a smile of so peculiar and disagreeable an import crept over her countenance that the Colonel again lost the thread of his discourse, and after vainly struggling to recover it, relapsed hopelessly into an agony of blushing silence.

"I think," observed Miss Marie, in a delicately modulated voice, "the less is said on that point the better. There is some proverb about not throwing stones in glass houses, is there not? I know you are fond of proverbs, Colonel Hythe; and, do tell me! are glass houses the same as conservatories?"

The unfortunate Colonel turned an apoplectic purple, got up, and walked to the other end of the room. I grieve to say there trembled on the tip of his tongue some very tempestuous language indeed.

Miss Prade followed his movements with an eye of shrewdest observation, then smiled to herself and lay back in her arm-chair with great placidity.

She had not a doubt of the result of the interview; and perhaps the undisguised expression of triumph, which nevertheless sat so well on the young lady's slightly defiant style of beauty, piqued her adversary into sterner opposition. However that might be, certain it is, that when he returned to his seat once more, he bore an appearance of pale, rigid determination he had not hitherto shown. Few men, above all those who themselves possess any force of character, are likely to be gained over to her will by the display of a similar quality in a woman.

“My dear girl,” said Gerald, with paternal mansuetude, “I have no desire to waste my time or yours in unprofitable discussion, so, if you will allow me, I shall just say what I have to say as briefly as I can. I cannot really believe that it is your intention to throw over poor Chaloner in the heartless manner you threaten. You are either amusing yourself at his expense, or putting his affection to a very bitter test. If it be only a joke, it is a cruel one, Miss Prade; if it be a trial, in all conscience it has gone far enough, and I appeal to you not to prolong the poor fellow’s misery any more. On the other hand, if it can be *possible* you are in earnest, in the name of common humanity I trust you will reconsider your decision. For God’s sake, reflect before it is too late; do not bring yourself to break your plighted troth and wreck a man’s life in cold blood for the gratification of a perfectly foolish and groundless caprice.”

Here the Colonel stopped, feeling that he had spoken very well indeed, and that, whatever the result, he had nobly redeemed his momentary forgetfulness of the claims of friendship.

Miss Prade, who had listened to him the while with the same quiet attention, paused a few seconds before replying. A shade had come over the bright triumph of her face, but it vanished so soon as she began to speak again.

“Bravo, Colonel!” she cried, with a mischievous laugh, while two mocking little demons leapt into her eyes. “Well, now you have said your say and done your duty nobly, and your conscience is quite clear again, I hope.”

Here she paused and looked at him, enjoying his confusion at having his thoughts thus calmly interpreted to him; and then, with one of her abrupt changes of mood—

“That being settled,” she said, in a voice so soft it fell on his ear like a caress, “let us talk of something else.”

She was perilously lovely, perilously sweet.

“Don't fret for Ned,” she went on; “he *knew* I did not love him. I never deceived him, and, for all we were engaged, sir, I never allowed *him* to—to kiss me.”

Her voice sank to a whisper, and then there was a dead silence.

Miss Prade got red, and then Miss Prade got white, and then she tapped her foot, and then she bit her lip. And yet Gerald spoke not. Poor fellow, it was a hard tussle. He was no more than mortal, after all, and she was passing fair, and—she loved him. She loved him; the thought set the blood coursing like wild-fire in his veins, every chivalrous tendency in his nature stirred by the frankness of her avowal; truly, if he had sinned he was punished, for it was a cruel thing for a man to have to do, and it hurt him through and through.

In a dumb frenzy of impatient longing he looked at her. Oh, if she would only understand how it was he could not speak, *could* not in the face of the world publish his treachery to Ned! How, if she would but wait a little while, all might yet come right between them, and that without scandal.

“Well?” said Miss Prade, in a hard, dry voice, rising stiffly as she spoke.

"I have no more to say," muttered the wretched man, almost inaudibly.

They stood facing each other, both white to the lips; his eyes sought her face timidly, deprecatingly, appealingly, but she met his glance with one of scorching contempt.

"*Coward!*"

She hissed the word from between her little, short teeth—hurled it at him, so to speak—with such concentrated passion that he felt as if she had struck him full in the face, and actually staggered as though under a blow.

Then she laughed, a hard, jarring, almost brutal laugh, that seemed hideously incongruous coming from her soft young lips.

"Congratulate yourself," she said, in a deadly calm voice which gave the Colonel an impression of a white heat of fury which was none too reassuring; "you have thoroughly succeeded in your mission. Thanks to you, I am now able to appreciate Ned, and I shall *cheerfully* marry him to-morrow. You have shown me too clearly the beauty of *honourable* behaviour, Colonel Hythe, for me to hesitate any more. I am sure you must be gratified by the excellent results of your disinterested conduct to me and to your friend."

Flashing on him another withering look, she sprang to the door and screamed wildly for Ned. He could not have been far off, for he appeared almost instantly at the other end of the hall. The poor fellow had been enduring a perfect agony of suspense, as his ashen face and trembling lips bore painful witness to, and seemed scarcely

able to speak with fright for what he might have to hear.

"Ned," cried Miss Prade, with another ugly laugh; "be happy. I shall marry you to-morrow, after all! Thank Colonel Hythe," she added, with savage emphasis, "for he has been a *true* friend to you."

"Oh, my darling!" gasped Ned, and made a clumsy lurch to seize her in his arms; she, however, deftly eluded his embrace, and fled from him up the broad stairs with the swiftness of some wild, hunted thing.

Foiled in his first legitimate outburst, Ned sought a vent for his overcharged feelings in another direction. Staggering into the library, he called his friend's name in tones that quavered with grateful emotion—

"Gerry—Gerry—*Gerry!*"

But no Gerry answered. No Gerry was there to receive the well-earned reward of merit. Contrary to all the traditions of the Guards, contrary to all the precedents of his name and race, the thought of another encounter was too much for the gallant officer, and he had fled before the enemy's approach.

Once more the happy party were assembled in the oak dining-room, for the weary day had at length worn away to evening, and it was dinner-time again at Lutcombe Manor. To-morrow, before three o'clock, all would be over.

"How glad he would be to leave the cursed place!"—so mused the Colonel as he sat beside his irreproachable hostess. Truth to say, it had been a hard day for him, and though he had borne himself well, he was none the less sorely tried. He had done his

duty at eminent trouble to himself; he had restored the ill-gotten goods he had unwittingly stolen; but where is it, save in Sunday School books, that such virtue is its own reward? The Colonel was all-devoured with jealous pain; under his cold and smooth exterior his heart was tempest-tossed, his pride was bleeding; and opposite to him sat Marie Prade, and through her purple eyelids, all swollen with crying, she looked at him as if she longed to kill him; and the glorious crimson lips into which she now and then thrust the savage little white teeth, as though to punish them for their quivering, uttered no word that night that was not full of covert insult to him.

Poor little girl! It hurt him, but he was not angry with her. Angry? he was yearning over her; *yearning* with a mad desire. To take the little upright form into his close embrace, to kiss the angry eyes and the dear tear-stained cheeks, to kiss the passionate mouth, and stop the cruel words with kisses, Great heavens! what would he not give for this? Would not his whole life be little in the balance? And then, Oh heavens! to have to see Ned gloating over her, to know that she was Ned's—that tomorrow she would be his wife—that *he*, fool that he was, had worked and striven for it, was it not enough to drive a man mad? And there he had to sit, and smirk, and talk, and joke with the best of them; to turn away his poor fierce little love's arrows with a well-bred jest or a good-humoured laugh, to respond to Ned's burdensome gratitude; to play the hypocrite, in fine, to them all.

No one could have guessed at the volcano raging under his outward cheerfulness. Never had the

Colonel been so brilliant. He was what is popularly called the "life of the table." Even Mr. Holmes was cheated by his genial humour into laughter and applause. The poor girl opposite to him felt, as the time advanced, more and more wild in her fury, more black in her despair. Could *nothing*, she said, make an impression on him? There was a perfect frenzy of rage towards him in her heart, and this gaiety and indifference was more than she could endure.

The dessert was laid on the table, the servants had withdrawn. For a few moments the Colonel relapsed into silence, and allowed his weary face to rest from smiles. Nobody noticed how worn and drawn he looked, nor how sadly he responded to the insolent look Miss Prade now fixed on him. He was thinking to himself, with infinite heart-sickness, "Thank God! the farce is nearly over now."

She, with two flaming spots on each cheek, continued to fix him with her insulting eyes. At last she spoke, and there was such strange emphasis in her clear, bell-like voice that all looked at her amazed.

"Did anyone ever hear of a *coward* getting the Victoria Cross?"

This said Miss Prade, still looking directly at the Colonel as she did so, that no one might mistake the import of her challenge. Ned grew lobster-like in hue, the Colonel grew very white, Mr. and Mrs. Holmes exchanged glances of utter despair.

"*Did you?*" said Miss Prade, with a laugh of scorn, addressing Gerald in the most personal manner.

"Miss Prade," answered he, very slowly, "I can only speak for myself. I know I have not the

courage to do a base thing in the face of the world. Thus you may reckon me a coward if you will."

Under his steady gaze her eyes fell. She tried to laugh, to rally, to retort with burning words, but instead only brought forth a strangled sob, and finally burst into a fit of hysterical weeping.

The spectators of this little drama were lost in bewilderment, but its *dénouement* was such as precluded all attempts at explanation, and the sobbing girl was hustled from the room with all speed by her excitable sister, to reappear no more that night.

The wedding passed off next day with a smoothness and decorum which its stormy preludes had hardly allowed one to expect. Everyone agreed that Marie was a lovely bride, though too self-assertive for the character; that Ned made a very silly-looking bridegroom, and seemed quite too sickeningly in love and too preposterously happy for anything; as for the best man, there could be no two opinions, he was simply perfection. And so the general verdict pronounced it a very jolly wedding, and it all went off splendidly.

As Mr. and Mrs. Chaloner at length drove away, amidst the showers of rice and general acclamation, no one thought of noting that, alone of all the company, the Colonel uttered no sound to swell the cheering, nor what his countenance had been like when he had to shake hands with the happy pair and wish them "God speed."

III.

ALL this has been past and gone for five years now. Colonel Hythe has "seen service" again, and now commands his regiment; he has a few more medals to hang on his broad expanse of chest, the ribbon of the Bath besides. People talk of him as a distinguished man, and are proud if he condescends to go to their parties. But this he seldom does.

He was wounded in the last campaign, and is terribly changed. His raven hair has grown grey on the temples; that gun-shot in the knee has lamed him for life and marred that stately height of his most sadly. He looks gaunt and old and careworn, and, worse than all, the inner man is even more changed than the external. He has lost that boyish laugh of his, that jovial spirit that made him so popular; he is an embittered, soured old cynic, and not half the fellow he used to be.

One day I came to know what it was had done the mischief with him.

Of course, when he related to me the little episode which I have just had the honour of laying before you, he never pretended it was anything but a mere picturesque experience in his very varied life, nor did I let him see how clearly I could read between the lines. It is always a marvel to me how a man can allow the love for any woman to make him unhappy even for a day, not to speak of his whole life. There are so many women in the world, and all so very much alike.

However, that is neither here nor there, and I will return to my story.

It happened in this wise. Dear old Gerry and I were walking down Bond Street one afternoon—last June, I think it was—he with one hand on my arm, the other on his ebony cane, and limping very much. Some days his poor knee seemed worse than others, and this day I knew he was in pain.

We had just reached that dreadfully unwholesome, delicious French bonbon shop, and were pausing before the window to look and laugh at the new extravagances in “bonbonnières,” when a very gorgeous carriage, drawn by two very gorgeous bays, drew up with a great clatter beside us, and a very gorgeous footman in powder leaped down to open the door.

Of course we transferred our attention from the “goodies” to the equipage.

A very little lady, dressed in the most marvellous combination of lace and jet, descended with great alacrity, and a little, very ugly boy, with goggle eyes and a gaping mouth, looking all the uglier for his splendid blue velvet attire, was carefully lifted out after her.

The little lady looked full at us. She was very pretty, and I was placidly admiring her original countenance when I felt the Colonel give a most violent start.

He dropped his stick and hobbled forward, two hands outstretched, his face suffused with crimson.

“Marie—Miss Prade—Mrs. Chaloner,” he stammered, “is it really you?”

I never saw the old boy so moved before. You

may be sure I scented a romance, and was all agog to see what would follow.

The splendid little lady cocked her head, and looked at him with an inquisitive, bird-like glance, to all appearance devoid of any kindred recognition.

"How do you do?" she cried, in a clear, ringing voice, which, however, was completely marred in my ears by the horrid way she italicised her words. "So *stupid* of me, I don't *quite* remember your name; I have *such* a bad memory."

Poor Gerald drew back, all the glow fading from his face. He looked very weary, and old, and haggard: a striking contrast to the plump, blooming, prosperous little matron before him.

"It is long, of course, since we met," he said, stiffly, "and I dare say I am much changed. But perhaps even the name of Gerald Hythe has faded from your memory."

"Hythe!" cried Mrs. Chaloner. A keen glance flashed for a moment into her eyes; it was not a pleasant one, but it was gone so quickly it could scarcely make an impression. "Of *course*, Mr. Hythe, how *stupid* of me!" she went on; with neat blandness; "we met last year at the Selbornes, *didn't* we? *How* is Mrs. Hythe? Are you in town? (Neddie, darling, don't pull your hat, my pet.) What a *lovely* day—just going to have a cup of chocolate—good-bye; pray forgive my stupid memory. (Come along, love.)"

And off she flounced into the shop, dragging her hideous little boy, who fondly clung to her, and whom she surveyed with the proudest maternal affection.

The Colonel spoke not a word. He stood staring after her through the glass door until he beheld her installed at a little marble table, before an overflowing cup of chocolate and a heaped-up plate of cakes.

Then he turned away with an expression of humiliation and disgust on his countenance I have never seen equalled, and took my arm again in silence. We went into my nearest club, and I gave him a large bumper of brandy and soda, for he looked quite sick. And it was then he told me the story of Chaloner's Wedding.

A PARAGRAPH IN THE "GLOBE."

I HAD comfortably installed myself in his deepest arm-chair, had filled his best pipe and blown the first luxurious puff, when Fraser's silence struck me as obtrusive. Peering at him through the cumulus of Virginian vapour, I saw at once that something startling had come across the path of his existence since I had entered his rooms.

He was still sitting on a corner of the table, but, gazing out of the rain-bespattered window, his eyes were lost in unfathomable distance. The pink sheets of the evening paper I had brought in with me lay limply on his knee.

This particular afternoon, with the privilege of an old college chum, I had sought him in the hope of recovering some mental elasticity after a long spell of work; for there is no place where I feel under more beneficial conditions than in his quiet chambers, no man whose company I find more congenial than the master thereof. An anomaly to many—the barrister who never seeks a brief, the handsome man who avoids society, the travelled man of more than independent means who looks upon Temple chambers as a modern Thelème, the most complete of solitaries in the heart of a multitude—I have sufficient tastes in common with him to appreciate his choice of existence, though belonging myself, of necessity, to that class for which there is no lotus-eating. Hence, perhaps, our long and rare friendship.

Anyhow, we understand each other. Therefore, finding him gone for "travels in the blue," I respected his mood and did not resent his prolonged mutism. After a while, however, the silence, marked by my regular puffs and the dry ticking of his old brass clock, seemed to oppress him in his turn. He roused himself and brought down his eyes from their distant contemplation to meet mine; then, mechanically, he again referred to the paper, and, with a curious, melancholy look, put it on one side.

"Excuse me, old man," he said, in answer to my mute inquiry, "but I have just stumbled across something which has suddenly brought me back to an event I have tried to forget."

He rose and paced his room thoughtfully. By-and-by, leaning against the mantelpiece, and musingly filling a long-bowled Hungarian pipe which he selected from his rack, he again looked down upon me from his great height, with the same unwonted expression in his eyes.

"It is a strange thing," he said, "to read here, casually, in the depths of prosy, grimy London, of the last scene of a drama, somewhere on the banks of the old Danube, in which I myself played an early part."

I stretched out my hand for the paper.

"Wait a moment," he went on, with a half smile; "if I give you the benefit of certain reminiscences of mine first, it will enable you better to understand the bearing of the little paragraph in question. You will see what a curious story can lurk behind a few lines of print." He paused, and I nodded in token of attention. Then, after a certain hesitation:

"You know," he said gravely, "I am not given to

romancing; and you are perhaps the only person to whom I should make this confession of an episode which has weighed heavily on my mind, because you will take it exactly as I tell it, without seeing either exaggeration or extenuation in my words—It is a tale of witchcraft," he added, with a short laugh, "for all that it took place in this enlightened century. You remember Herzfeldt in our old days at Cambridge?"

"Herzfeldt of Trinity?"

"The same. I believe he went down soon after you came up, without taking a degree, and though he and I were great friends, I then lost sight of him completely. A handsome, clever fellow, mad on athletics and popular in proportion; looked like an Englishman too, as so many Austrians do. Well, three years ago, I met him again, quite by accident, during that long continental ramble I indulged in after being called. It was in Vienna. Feeling rather seedy, I had gone to consult a famous doctor, when who should walk into the waiting-room after me but Herzfeldt. I never should have recognised him, he was so incredibly changed: thin, worn, feeble, an old man before his time; but he knew me instantly and seemed delighted at the meeting. We were deep in conversation at once, and, of course, as my personal news could be epitomised in few words, he did most of the talking.

"He had come into his mother's property somewhere in the Theiss district of Hungary, and he was married. That was the great event, especially as it was comparatively recent; no doubt about its having been a love match: his haggard face flushed like a

boy's over it; and it seemed a romantic affair enough from his account: a chance meeting on the other side of the Carpathians, while on a sporting expedition, with a child of those wild solitudes; love at first sight—anyhow, on his side—a madness of love, which never rested till he had carried her off as his bride. He dwelt a good deal on her extraordinary beauty and attractiveness, but not a word about her family: a silence which I thought ominous in one of his proud race, and from which I drew my own conclusions.

“Only the necessity of seeking advice about some strange symptoms which of late have grown frequent brings me so far from her to-day,” he concluded, smiling; ‘we are still in our honeymoon though full three months married!’

“On my summons to the consulting-room, which here interrupted us, I agreed to wait for him till he, too, should be dismissed. This was not, however, until so prolonged a delay that I began to lose patience; but the look on his face as he emerged at length froze remonstrance and even inquiry on my lips. He took my arm mechanically and walked out of the house like a man in a dream. After we had paced half the length of the street he suddenly halted and looked at me.

“‘He gives me a year,’ he said quietly.

“I stared at him: ‘Good God! what do you mean?’

“‘A year, with great care and avoiding all emotions;’ he spoke smilingly but his mouth twitched. ‘This is a curious piece of news for a bridegroom, is it not? No emotions, no violent exercise; to vegetate,

hardly to move—what a prescription!’ He took my arm again and on we went a little in renewed silence. What had I to say to such an announcement that would not seem the paltriest platitude!

“‘It is the heart, of course,’ he pursued after a while, in a more natural tone. ‘Let us go down this way; I am bound for the chemist’s, for the making up of a certain receipt which Dr. B—— says may save my life—for the moment, be it understood—when the symptoms reappear, and which, in consequence, he says, I am never to be without. I am sorry to have victimised you with this business, Fraser; yet I am selfishly glad to think some friendly soul knows my secret. Of course,’ half to himself, ‘I cannot tell her.’

“‘Why not?’ I exclaimed, impulsively. ‘It is surely her right to know, her duty——’

“‘You cannot conceive what nonsense you are talking,’ he interrupted me with a curious outburst of irritation. ‘You Englishmen would judge all women by your own wives and mothers——’ He checked himself abruptly, as he caught sight of my amazed countenance, bade me a hurried and careless good-bye, and left me.

“Wondering, and not a little chafed, I stood and watched him. Half-way across the street he paused, hesitated, and finally came back.

“‘We are at Csendlák, my country place,’ he said, with some constraint. ‘Do you think you could, shortly, spare a few days to visit a man with one foot in the grave?’

“The invitation was not pressing; but I saw in his eyes that he would like me to accept, though there was something in the background which made him

doubtful. At once I jumped at the conclusion that he was jealous of his young wife, and I confess I thought it unworthy of him. Yet, under the circumstances, I could not refuse, and was glad of it, for his mysterious manner had piqued my curiosity. He wrote all the necessary directions on his card.

"'You will come, then,' he said; 'that is well. Our first visitor.' But there was still the doubt and wistfulness on his face. Then we again shook hands and parted.

"Well, to cut a long story short, after a week I landed at Szolnok, the station Herzfeldt had indicated, late in the afternoon. There I found a mail phaeton, two splendid horses, and a villainous-looking Hungarian in picturesque attire, waiting to convey me across the remaining fifteen miles of that unkempt, desolate, yet rich country. The autumnal air was hot and damp, my conductor taciturn. We had gone some two-thirds of the way under these cheerful circumstances, and I had fallen into a somnolent state, when I was suddenly aroused by the sound of what seemed a mad gallop behind us. We were traversing a wide plain absolutely denuded of habitation, wreathed with rising mists and strangely dreary under the fading sky. There was still a broad belt of orange light in the west, and as I looked back I saw, blackly defined against it, the image of a woman on horseback. She was urging her steed with weird little cries as of some wild bird; in a flash she was upon us, and in another flash was gone.

"As she passed she looked back at me over her shoulder, and I caught a glimpse of a perfectly white face, heavy yellow hair, and extraordinarily luminous

eyes. You may believe me or not, but her look *struck* me—I can use no other word—like a blow.

“My driver gazed after her, imperturbably, as if Valkyries on the rampage were an accustomed sight, but my curious questions he could not, or would not, understand. So, with the strange image printed on my brain and passing and repassing before me in the gathering gloom, I was forced to reserve my curiosity for Herzfeldt.

“It was quite dark when we reached the house. My host was at the gate awaiting me and his welcome was of the warmest.

“‘I was grieved not to be able to meet you and drive you back myself,’ he said, as he brought me to my room, ‘but I could not risk it.’ The grey pallor of his face, the marked change for the worse in the whole man, even in the short time since we had met, gave melancholy weight to his words.

“‘Now do not trouble to dress,’ he went on rapidly, with determined cheerfulness; ‘my wife is already expecting us in the dining-room.’

“He conducted me through the house—typically Hungarian: sumptuous, vast, comfortless, and un-homelike—to the dining-room, which was as large as a church; there, standing under the full light of the lamps, I beheld—of course you guess, Hughes, I see it in your superior smile—but I had not a suspicion of it, and when Herzfeldt’s wife turned out to be my Valkyrie of the road, I felt a disagreeable shock at the discovery. Why? I should have been puzzled to explain.

“Herzfeldt addressed her in German, the only language in which we could all three meet.

"'Hedwig, this is my old friend. Bid him welcome.'

"She favoured me with a hard stare and stretched out her hand with the one word: '*Willkommen.*'

"As we sat down and the meal began, I could not help examining her with a curiosity nearly as open as her own. She was not by any means the extraordinary beauty I had expected, yet hers was a strange personality and one which I could not meet with indifference, which from the first affected me to the most inexplicable extremes. Strongly built but perfectly proportioned; a skin of opaque, changeless pallor, on which the scarlet lips made almost too vivid a spot of colour; light grey-green eyes, that each time gave me a fresh surprise when I fell under their scintillating glance; coils and coils of dead-yellow hair wound round a curiously flattened head.

"Perhaps the most striking character was an air of intense but repressed vitality, of being ready to spring, behind movements of languorous softness, that reminded me indifferently, or rather collectively, of a cat and a snake. She spoke in a low drawl, broken now and then with loud, inharmonious resonances.

"That night, however, for the most part she was silent; Herzfeldt, on the contrary, talked a great deal, with a forced joviality, unlike the real man and in painful contrast with his state. At dessert the conversation turned on riding.

"'It is almost our whole life here,' said Herzfeldt, 'but just now my rheumatism obliges me to abstain, or we should have had some lengthy expeditions together.' He gave me a sad look of warning as he

spoke. 'We shall enjoy our gallops again, shall we not, Hedwig? It was horrible to have to let you go alone to-day!'

"Her answer was a curious one. She first leaned her elbows on the table and looked at him with a broad, incomprehensible smile; then taking a cake in both hands, tore a piece off with her teeth, flung the remainder to the great slate-coloured hound that sat beside her, struck him sharply across the muzzle the next instant, and laughed with loud, quick delight at the brute's sharp howls of pain. Throughout the whole incident hers were the actions of a savage.

"Revolted, I glanced at Herzfeldt—the soul of refinement, as you no doubt remember him; his eyes were bent on his plate and his face was set as if in some mental or physical struggle. Noisily pushing her chair away, my hostess rose. She looked at me, when I opened the door, as if expecting me to accompany her, but Herzfeldt showed no sign of moving, and I took it for granted that we were to adopt the English custom. With an angry movement, she passed out alone, swaying her body from side to side in a way that again made me think of some unknown animal combination.

"When I came back to my friend, I saw with alarm that he was evidently suffering from one of his heart attacks. His face was ghastly pale and he struggled for breath; in his shaking hand he held a phial which he was endeavouring to uncork. Quickly, as I gathered the sense of the scarcely articulate directions he strove to give me, I measured out and mixed the drops, which were strong of some powerful ethers, and poured them down his throat. The

medicine seemed to have an almost magic effect; in another couple of minutes the paroxysm began to pass; colour returned to his face and the perspiration broke out on his forehead—the danger was over for the nonce. He lay down on the divan, exhausted.

“‘This is the second in three days,’ he said presently; ‘they are becoming much more frequent. I generally contrive to dose myself at the beginning, but to-night I could not before Hedwig.’ Then, with a smile, pointing to the bottle: ‘You have spilt some, I think. I see there is but a third left: I must write for more; it is literally the elixir of life to me. Life!—such as it is I wish to prolong it.’ And suddenly breaking out with a subdued concentration of passion: ‘A pretty figure I must cut before my young wife! What can she think, she who was convinced she had wedded the most dashing of men, of this pitiful hypochondriac? She loved me for my cavalier parts, you know,’ he went on with a bitter laugh. ‘Ah, Fraser, what a wooing that was, and what a piteous ending to it all! If I could but have broken my neck in one of our wild rides. . . . But no!’ interrupting himself fiercely, ‘by every means I am determined to prolong an existence in which at least I can call her mine. Hedwig loves me still.’ This was said after a pause, with a sort of defiance, as if in answer to some inner suggestion, and, rising, he put an end to the interview.

“Of course I am not going to describe my whole stay at Csendlák, but will merely touch on such scenes as form, so to speak, the stages of that episode. The next, then, was on the third day of my visit; we were all three on the terrace, whiling away a hot hour

with pistol-shooting. Herzfeldt's wife, a cigar between her lips, lying back in a wicker chair, her shapely feet in their untanned boots resting on a high cushion, was basking after the mid-day meal in her cat-like way and watching us with lazy intentness. I made a brilliant score—you know I happen to be rather a good hand at a *carton*; pistol-shooting is a lost art among us, but I have had opportunity to cultivate it in Paris—but Herzfeldt shot wretchedly, and that after long aims. Once or twice he had to lower his hand, which trembled visibly. After a few attempts, with a look of discouragement, he gave it up; it was dreadful to see that he felt humiliated before his wife.

"‘A complete break up, my boy,’ he said in English, with a sad smile. On her face there was a light of amusement. Not wishing to prolong the scene, I was replacing the weapons in their box, when she got up.

"‘One more!’ she said; ‘I like to see you aim so quickly and shoot so straight.’

"Obediently I lifted my hand and this time carelessly missed.

"‘All luck, you see,’ I urged, anxious to cover Herzfeldt's vexation. ‘Won't you let me rest on my laurels? As for Herzfeldt, he is out of condition; when he is himself he can beat me.’

"But the latter here interposed, irritably bidding me talk no nonsense and go on shooting without further mock modesty.

"‘Yes; one more—for me,’ repeated my hostess, musingly. ‘What shall it be?’ Then, with her broad smile: ‘I know,’ she said, unfastened the gold

brooch at her throat, and, in her swinging, swaggering way, stepped up to an old tree and fixed the pin in the bark.

"Herzfeldt frowned. 'My last present!' he muttered. 'Never mind, Fraser; bring it down, shiver it!'

"I felt her eyes on me as I raised the pistol towards the tiny, glinting spot. To my own astonishment—for I had fired almost unconsciously—the ball grazed the trinket and sent it spinning upwards.

"Without a word, Herzfeldt went to look for it, and, laughing, I turned round to his wife, to meet her eyes still fixed upon me with a gaze that suddenly appalled me.

"That blood-red smile, that glass-green glance, were full of an odious, wicked, satisfied significance, which I could not—dared not—put into shape, even in my most secret mind, for the horror of seeming privy to it.

"'Thank you,' she said to me, after a moment; then she took her brooch from her husband's hand and walked away. Half angrily, half sadly, he looked after her, whilst I, in vain, endeavoured to shake off the strange obsession, the unreasoning dread, left upon me by the sorcery of her eyes.

"I was beginning dimly to understand the nature of Herzfeldt's infatuation for her, since I myself—cool-headed Briton though I be—was unable to escape her strange influence. For the rest of the day and the whole night afterwards, sleeping or waking, I was haunted by her image; though when away from the inexplicable attraction of her actual presence the spell immediately changed its character and my unwilling

mind dwelt on her with no other feelings but those of horror, of disgust.

"Under these circumstances, finding all my reason and philosophy of no avail, I rose the next morning with the intention of curtailing my visit as much as I could without hurting Herzfeldt's feelings. But fate itself intervened—that next day was destined to be the last I spent within those gates. A ride had been arranged for the purpose of showing me the pride of the estate, an imprudence which I feared for Herzfeldt, who daily looked more shattered. But a certain irritability he had of late displayed with me kept me from remonstrating. At the appointed hour, however, two horses only made their appearance, and the groom handed me a note. 'I dare not go out to-day—you understand—yet would not disappoint her,' it said. 'Invent some excuse for me and have your ride.'

"Even as I finished reading, his wife came out of the house. In a sort of abstraction, and totally unheeding my explanations, she walked up to her black Bessarabian and planted a kiss in each fiery nostril. Then, accepting my ministrations with seeming unconsciousness, her arched foot with its glittering spur scarcely pressing my palm, she sprang into the saddle with some wild eastern exclamation. Immediately the animal reared and plunged, while, in fear for her, I held its head as firmly as I might—and now an ecstasie look came on her face; the lazy eyes shot brilliancy, the red lips parted. Suddenly, with a rage of impatience, she cut at me with her whip, 'Let him go—let him go!' she panted.

"In an instant the brute broke away, shot across

the courtyard, rose like a bird to the stone wall and disappeared. Hurriedly I mounted, and, in his turn, my horse, quivering with fury at being left behind, darted after his companion. I gave him his head, and before long had rejoined her; she had settled down to a canter, awaiting me. As I drew near she looked round with a silent smile, but no sooner were we abreast than, with another weird cry, she spurred on again, and away we flew at a tearing gallop.

"What an experience that was! How can I describe it without your thinking me the veriest madman? Cleaving through the sunny air by the side of that strange woman who seemed to live only through her senses, infected by her ecstasy, was like one of those voluptuous, fantastic dreams which sometimes arouse in us an unknown, untamed nature. As if I had quaffed deeply of its fiery wine, I felt as if the old spirit of that land had entered into me; I was drunk with exultation; ever and anon her glance sank into mine; her transfigured, bloodless face grew minute by minute more beautiful to me. Our minds were at unison; it was her savage, sensual soul that animated me. I thought of Herzfeldt, mortally diseased, with hatred and repulsion; I thought of her, in her young, strong vitality, with passionate rapture.

"How long the enchantment lasted I can hardly say; gradually our supernatural steeds slackened pace: panting, covered with foam, they at length fell into a walk.

"'This is life,' said one of us, whether she or I, I never knew. I looked at her. She was breathless; the heaviness of exhaustion lay round her eyes; then

I too felt unaccountably broken with fatigue, a chill crept over me, and, in that second, as if a chasm had opened before me, I saw my danger.

"'We must go back,' I cried in a toneless voice; trembling like a craven, conscious of but one clear thought—the imperative necessity of my instant departure—I turned my horse's head homewards. She followed me, she spoke to me; I cannot remember what I answered or if I answered at all. The spell was broken, the glamour had faded. In silence we reached the house. I dared not glance at her. I was afraid to help her to dismount; I sprang from my horse and rushed indoors. As luck would have it, in the hall I found a letter awaiting me, which I seized upon as a pretext and straightway sought my host.

"'I have had news which necessitates my leaving you,' I said; 'can you send me to the station to-day?'

"He looked at me with a sudden awful suspicion; but when our eyes met, his face cleared.

"'There is a train at ten o'clock,' he answered simply, 'I shall order Gregor to be round after dinner.' Then, moved by the same impulse, we clasped hands.'

Here Fraser stopped. It was evident that the memories crowding upon him were painful in the extreme. He took a few turns up and down the room, and, after a while, resumed with an effort.

"How great a difference would it have made to my whole future existence had I left then and there! though, for what happened that evening, I try to console myself with the knowledge that nothing

could have saved Herzfeldt from his doom; that the very springs of his being were broken by that fatal union; that I myself was more victim than culprit. My share in what occurred is a memory which must for ever darken my life.

"The early hour of the Hungarian dinner came. She was dressed with greater elaborateness than usual; at her throat gleamed the little brooch dented by my bullet; her face seemed more weirdly white, her lips more fearfully red, her eyes glassier. Beset as I was by conflicting emotions, her presence tortured me. I scarcely looked towards her, partly, perhaps, because her manners at table were far from pleasant, partly because I dreaded to meet the strange, meaning smile which, by the very side of my dying friend, appeared to claim my complicity in the terrible thought that prompted it.

"A feeble conversation lingered a while between Herzfeldt and me. He plied me with his best wine, he talked, not without emotion, of our old college days and the love he cherished still for England and Englishmen; but I found it hard to respond, and so we fell into silence. By a tacit though almost unconscious understanding neither he nor I alluded to my impending departure. After the meal I took an early opportunity to escape to my room and don my travelling gear. When I came down again the great hall and the adjoining apartments were deserted; thinking the husband and wife were together, I forbore to seek Herzfeldt, and fell to pacing the length of the ill-lighted dining-room from end to end. Presently the valet, carrying my portmanteau, paused at the door to tell me the carriage would soon be

round. With an impatient sigh, I resumed my march.

"Then, in the gloom and chilling silence, an uncomfortable impression of being watched stole over me, and, gradually, as if drawn to it, I met the gaze of two shining eyes fixed on me from the darkest corner. It was the woman again.

"She advanced softly into the light.

"'You dare to go—faint-heart, you are running away!' She spat the words at me in a fierce whisper. I felt giddily that I was falling into her power again. My mind—I cannot express it otherwise—was seized with trembling. As to what followed I have myself but a vague knowledge, and must again refer you to your dreams—if practical men such as you ever dream. Her hand fell on mine—mine must have been icy cold, for her touch was burning—her gaze encompassed my whole being, and, before I could grasp at my intelligence and save my honour, the lithe, gorgeous form was in my arms. As in a dream, I could not measure time, but the madness cannot have lasted a second. My arms had barely closed round her when, with an angry movement, like a snake disturbed, she had glided from me, and at the sound of a voice the thrall fell away, with a rush like that of a torrent, from my brain. I came to an awful awakening.

"Yet the voice was neither loud nor menacing. 'Could you not have waited?' it said quietly; 'it would not have been for long.'

"Thrilled to the marrow, I looked and saw Herzfeldt—my friend, my host! . . . His face was ashen, his eyes shone with phosphorescent light, he

was smiling. It was horrible. Then, slowly, he went away. I could have roared, like the psalmist, for the groaning of my heart; there are no words to express what I felt.

"At that moment came the sound of carriage-wheels at the door, and my first impulse was to fly at once from the accursed place; but I am glad I was saved at any rate that baseness. As I turned into the hall, the hateful vision of Hedwig arrested me on the threshold; silently, with a significant gesture, she fingered the broken trinket at her throat and vanished.

"My mind leaped to her evil meaning, but with a widely different conclusion—the thought of seeking death before Herzfeldt's pistol came almost as a relief.

"Like a madman, I rushed down the passage and burst into his study. From the very door the pungent smell of the drug seized me by the throat. He was sitting alone, panting, with his nails dug in his breast; when he saw me he smiled—an awful smile of contempt—through the agony of his seizure.

"'You see,' he said in broken words that ended in a hiss, 'I have spared you even the trouble of shooting me.' And with palsied hand he pointed to the phial shattered at his feet, from which the life elixir was spreading, in a wide, blackening, hideous stain on the white hearth.

"The awful determination of that suicide, to be consummated before my eyes, for a moment nearly turned my brain. Some wild cry of self-exculpation escaped me in the impotence of my distress—words of madness, for what could I say?—but the fearful irony of his fast-glazing eye withered me to silence.

I threw myself on my knees beside him; with a supreme effort of anger, he recoiled from my touch, rose to his full height, and showed me the door.

"Then, gasping convulsively, with the grey circle of death already round his open mouth, he fell forward on his face.

"As, with frenzy, I sought to restore the dead to life, light footfalls fell upon my ear, and she who was as truly her husband's murderess as she was the murderess of my honour, came into the room. I sprang to my feet. Once more I looked upon her, saw the flash of satisfaction behind her first glance of mere curiosity, met the infamy of those eyes as they sought mine, and my head reeled. But the spell was now one of pure horror. She barred my way and would have spoken. I struck her from me and fled. I heard her cry out, in strident tones. '*Bambá. . . Bambá!*' And the cry pursued me even as I leaped into the carriage and was whirled away into the night."

Fraser broke off. He had grown a little pale and his eyes again sought the grey depth of rain outside. In a moment or two he resumed.

"Some time after, haunted by that unknown word, I asked its meaning. It seems its English equivalent is *dolt*—*fool*. . . . I thought it had been coward."

We remained silent for a while. I paid Fraser's curious narrative the compliment of refraining from trivial comments.

"That was three years ago," he said at length; "what may have been her dealings with the world during her young widowhood I have had neither

occasion nor wish to learn. But this, no doubt, was a fitting end to it all."

He handed me the paper. "Now you may realise the true import of this paragraph," pointing to the place with the stem of his still unlighted pipe.

I read the following :

"A terrible tragedy is reported from Pesth, where it is creating great sensation. The Gräfin Paul von Herzfeldt was found yesterday murdered in her own house under circumstances of horrible barbarity. No robbery was attempted and the wildest rumours are afloat as to the motive of the crime. The lady, who was a widow and only two-and-twenty years of age, is stated to have been possessed of great wealth and considerable personal attractions."

Rococo.

MASTER HULDEBRAND.

BY AGNES CASTLE.

THERE was no one in the whole *Residenz* we Sachs-Langweiligers were prouder of than our Court Capellmeister, Court Professor, Town Music Director and Composer, Master Huldebrand ; and this showed, once more, how liberal and large-minded we had become in the enlightened reign of Ludwig Wilhelm III., our hereditary prince and ruler, and how infinitely superior to the general prejudices of the age ; for what was Master Huldebrand, after all, but a poor charity boy, of unknown and probably disreputable parentage, and without even a surname of his own ?

But then he was a genius, and we Sachs-Langweiligers knew what we were about ; we were not going to drive the best star out of our sky to shine on another land. Ah ! it's a wise nation that knows its own geniuses ; and that's as true a proverb as ever I heard, though I made it myself.

Thus we took some pride to ourselves, and justly, for the penetration we had displayed in discovering our artist's talent in spite of his humble position ; and, moreover, we had reason to be truly satisfied with the result, for under our generous encouragement he became a great man.

Heavens, how he played ! Such a musician was never heard either before or since.

"He is greater than Handel," said the Court Doctor to me after our last State Concert ; and I made answer ;

“Handel! pfui! Shame yourself, doctor, to mention even his name with our master’s.”

Not that I ever heard Handel, you know; but then, I heard our master, and that was enough for me. One knows when a thing is so good that it cannot be better. Such was his playing, and more than that—surpassing the unsurpassable as it were. Na! I wish you had been there to listen to him.

In his hands, whatever instrument he chose became like a speaking creature. A living stream of melody flowed from beneath his fingers, sometimes so sad that the heart would swell in one’s bosom; or yet so gay, it was as if the very spirit of spring took possession of one; or yet again so yearning, so unspeakably tender, pathetic, and wild, that it verily seemed as if one’s life were ebbing away on the strain, as though one’s soul were being drawn from one’s body, inch by inch, so that one felt inclined to cry aloud: “Stop, master, stop, or I shall die,” were it not that, for the beauty of it, one would not have lost a note for kingdoms. And then at times he would change his mood, and send grand bursts of full harmony crashing down into the *saal*—a triumphal march or a battle-song growing ever louder and louder, higher and higher, faster and faster, filling one with noble and heroic aspirations, exciting, glorious, magnificent! I have seen on such occasions the whole audience rise like one man and join in with a sonorous chorus as if the master’s genius had enkindled in them all a spark of the same divine fire.

Well, as you perceive, Master Huldebrand was duly appreciated in Sachs-Langweiligen, not only by us enlightened and well-to-do townsfolk, who liked to

encourage art and culture for the good of the country, but likewise by the people—soldiers, mechanics, labourers, down to the very street boys, who would whistle no other airs but his, swarm around him, when he passed, to salute and cheer him, and hang by dozens round the concert-room to catch a few notes of his playing each time the door was opened. Yea, the very Prince himself treated him with distinguished favour and a condescension even amounting to affectionate familiarity; and so highly did our discriminating Sovereign think of him that, young as he was, he appointed him to no less a position than that of Professor of Music to her Serene Highness the Princess Seraphina Sophia, his only daughter.

Ah! she was a sweet creature, and as popular as the master himself. It was a great honour; but you see—and so it must be—genius has its privileges.

I doubt if there were any one of them the artist appreciated so keenly as his constant intercourse with that lovely and gracious being. None knew the real reason why he so persistently and generously refused all the grand offers which other Courts frequently made to lure him from our *Residenz*; offers of emoluments far greater, and of patronage far more powerful, than he could hope for in our country; so that the disinterestedness with which he refused them all added not a little to his popularity. But it was not altogether exclusive devotion to Sachs-Langweiligen that prompted his conduct. And if you are so curious as to want to hear how I come to have known what nobody else knew, I can only tell you it is because I am the story-teller, and that story-tellers have a way of finding out everything, no matter how.

And as for the reason itself—the reason that kept our ambitious, romantic artist, who shared with all those of his class the love of roving and adventure, tied to one spot like a parrot to his perch. Ah, well, well, our Princess was lovely to see!

Graceful as a willow, and slender, and yet developing day by day into the generous, delicate fulness of womanly perfection; with eyes blue as summer seas, eyes which the more you looked at them the deeper and darker they seemed, and the more you wanted to look, all Princess as she was—with a face fair as a white flower, and features straight and fine, of a beauty—inherited from the dead Princess her mother—of the true Austrian type; the mouth, with its pure proud lines, its short curving upper lip and exquisite passionate, swelling under one, would have seemed haughty, perchance, had it not been for the tenderness and candour of its smile. All this was our Princess, all this and a thousand times more, for she was a woman whose charm was felt to the very heart's core, and 'tis not for any to describe her in cold black and white.

Master Huldebrand gave her lessons twice a week on the clavier. Seraphina Sophia had a soul which vibrated to music; indeed, she had a dreamy, enthusiastic nature which found pleasure in everything poetic, romantic, or heroic, and almost too susceptible to each passing emotion.

Every Tuesday and Friday in the year—save state feasts and holidays of obligation—the master hied him to the palace and for one hour had the supreme happiness and distinction of speaking to her, listening to her, basking in her presence.

On these two days the master lived the rest of the week, the memory of the past and the longing for the coming, from each Friday to Tuesday and each Tuesday to Friday, forming as it were a golden bridge which bore him across the dull stream of life.

Yet it was a very formal affair, after all, strictly regulated by court etiquette, and carried on throughout under the lynx eyes of the Baroness von Gräfelheuer, the Princess's once grim governess and then grim lady-in-waiting.

Tuesdays and Fridays it was always the same, and had been for three years, even as to the royal pupil's progress; for, though her musical aspirations were great, her execution was limited. The only variety to the entertainment was furnished by the Baroness' temper—if the ever-increasing beauty and the softly maturing charms of Seraphina, the lovely development from fifteen to eighteen, be left out of the question—which was of different degrees of sharpness and contradictoriness, according to the condition of her stomach, she being addicted to acidity in that region; and likewise according to the peculiar phase her hatred of the professor (which for no reason had flourished in her bosom ever since she first laid eyes on him) happened to take that day.

After such fashion, as follows, did the lesson take place at the palace on the days appointed. At five minutes to twelve you might behold the professor in his long black coat hurrying into the Court gardens, a roll of music under his arms, a little, scarcely visible cloud of scented powder floating about his head, and his fine slim legs in their well-drawn silk stockings twinkling up the gravelled paths with

marvellous celerity. Three minutes before noon would see him in the music *saal*—a great yellow room with polished inlaid floor—standing by the long clavier which had been made expressly for Seraphina, straightening his rolls of music on the desk. There were three great windows hung with damask curtains, behind him and before him two long mirror-framed walls that seemed to stretch forth *ad infinitum* with sedate rows of yellow and gilt chairs on either side.

Just as the clock finished striking the twelfth hour, the door at the far end would open, and—enter the Princess and her attendant. And Master Huldebrand could watch her as she came the whole length of the room towards him with that inexpressible undulating grace of hers which the Baroness' waddling accompaniment threw into still stronger relief.

And as she passed each mirror, a vision of her exquisite profile would flit across it like a sunbeam, and stir the heart of the poor musician with extraordinary yearning. Then came bows and curtseys, after which the lesson began.

The Princess sitting down to play, the master standing by her side listening with great intentness, one nervous hand propping his lean cheek, and his great haunting dark eyes fixed on the keys. He seldom raised them to her face during the whole hour they were together, so that even the Gräfelheuer could find little fault with his bearing.

The Princess made many false notes. She oft-times seemed to be playing as in a dream, and then, though her blue gaze would be fixed on the music, it looked as if she saw very different things from crotchets and quavers, bars and rests. Now and

again came Master Huldebrand's grave, tender voice breaking the sweet discords in this manner :

“ Her Highness is wrong. Her Highness forgets to count. Will her Highness please to begin that bar again ? ”

All of which her Highness would obey. Sometimes with a placid docility—occasionally with a soft protesting pout which made her look as if she were thrusting out her red lips for a kiss. Oh, those were moments especially when the professor had to keep his tell-tale eyes most rigidly cast down ! Else, God knows what might not have happened. It makes me tremble to think of it.

But it had come to pass, and more frequently of late, that when she had played a little while, the Princess would push her chair away from the keyboard and cry that she could not go on with the piece till she heard the Herr Professor's rendering of it.

And as Princesses' wishes are law, at least to their loyal subjects, the master would silently take her seat and let his fingers stray over the notes.

Never did he play with a tenderer grace, a more insidious charm or a sublimer passion, than while his royal pupil listened to him. And she, gracious maiden, would be so absorbed in his music, her full eyes so wrapt in admiration on his face, her very being seemingly so lost in dreamy pleasure, that, all august Princess as she was, the Baroness Gräfelheuer would be seized with a sort of itching impatience to shake her, and never failed to put an end to the proceeding by some ill-natured remonstrance or sour interposition.

One day, as the musician was playing to her thus,

Seraphina murmured, in a voice which seemed but an echo of, and to harmonise with, the melody in some strange way :

“Oh, master, the divine thing to be able to play like that! Oh, what would I not give to be an artist too!”

“What childish nonsense, your Highness!” croaked the Baroness, who had somehow intercepted the floating words which the Princess had yet more breathed than spoken. She was like an evil old witch, that Gräfelheuer. “*You* an artist, a poor creature that earns his bread and plays for money! Heaven preserve us! if any one had heard you say that but me. A princess is a princess, and can never be anything less.”

Master Huldebrand broke off in his accords with a little abrupt note as of anger, and rose from the piano.

“Have you never heard that an artist was sometimes a man, Baroness?” said he; and his lips curved into a fine cold smile; “or that a princess might be a woman, sometimes?”

Then the clock struck one; he took the music-roll and placed it under his arm, pressed his hat to his heart, bowed low, and left the room; all this before the Baroness, who was struck quite breathless by the outrageousness of the proposition, could find a word wherewith to answer him.

That was what came of setting such *Lumpen* into society so much above them, said she; any one could see he was nothing but a charity boy; and as for his playing, she could not conceive what people found in it. It was all up and down and every way; there was nothing settled about it.

But the Princess went to her room alone, and sat by the window dreaming.

* * * * *

It was a Tuesday in early March ; in our sheltered southern valley-land spring comes to us when elsewhere it is yet winter ; and the chestnut trees were already covered with sticky buds, and there was a gracious green powdering of twinkling leaves all over the hedges and hawthorn trees ; the air was full of balmy breezes and growing scents, and the master's heart was full of spring longings and strivings as he wended his way to the palace.

Now, he lived so shut up in his art, and so secluded in his own dreamy life, that none of the rumours, which for the last two days had been creating such a stir in our peaceful town, had yet reached his ears. Neither did he know of the sudden arrival of the Archduke Adolphus Frederick from his splendid Archduchy in the north, nor of the extraordinary entertainment at the palace in consequence ; nor of the excitement in the whole *Residenz*.

You must know that the Archduke of Hassau—who had but lately succeeded his brother on the throne—was a great man, cousin to the King of Prussia himself, and of fabulous wealth and influence in the land ; and we Sachs-Langweiligers were too shrewd not to divine he had come with a purpose, even before the state announcement was made.

But artists are queer folk ; and in all innocence our master hurried to the palace on this eventful Tuesday to hear the Princess play her false notes.

The first strange thing that happened—and it was

to be a day replete with strange things to Master Huldebrand—was that he was kept waiting over half an hour. For three years the Princess had never failed to make her appearance as the clock struck, so it was not surprising that the master should enter into a state of some uneasiness at the irregularity.

At twenty-three minutes to one, however, the door opened as usual and in came Seraphina and her attendant. Now no sooner had he laid eyes on her than the musician became aware that something had happened, for though the Princess advanced towards him with the same gentle, dignified courtesy as ever, there was a subtle change in her face, which perchance he alone would have noticed; an awakened, deepened look of life, a heightened colour on her placid cheek, a curious depression and compression of the soft, proud lips. As to the Baroness, she was all agog; her whole body seemed quivering with malicious anticipation, an extraordinary rapture of triumphant spite gleamed in the depths of her green eyes.

“Good-morning, master,” said Seraphina Sophia, in that full-toned voice of hers that satisfied the artist’s fastidious ear to its utmost craving as no other music did in all the world. Yet to-day there was a tone the less in that cherished sound; a joy was wanting; and the master turned pale.

He saluted, but did not speak; in silence and with trembling hands he smoothed the music sheets on their stand.

The Princess sat down and struck a listless note, then let her hands fall inertly from the keys.

“He, he!” cried the Gräfelheuer in her sawing, rasping way, “will her Highness not tell the Herr Professor the good tidings? I would not that even a scullion in the palace kitchen be ignorant of our joy to-day—and the Herr Professor is so loyal, he will be out of himself with gladness, I make no doubt.”

The master looked across at the little sharp eyes twinkling so malignantly on him from the bilious wrinkled face, and trembled with a strange apprehension.

“Why, ’tis glorious news, Herr Professor,” pursued the Baroness. “What think you? Our Serene Highness is betrothed, actually betrothed; and a grand match it is too, and to so fine a man! Na! I knew you would be overcome with joy.”

The look which held him, here became so fiendish in its spite that the master felt his soul withering within him. How had this hag read its inmost yearning? How had she learned his secret of secrets; that which was buried in the holiest and deepest recess of his heart; what he had not even told his music yet? And then the bearing of her words came in upon him, and he looked, struck with mortal agony, over to the Princess, as if blindly seeking one blessed ray of light to save him.

But she sat with her head turned away, and he, knowing that the truth had been spoken, was overcome by a great desolation. Rigid he stood, nevertheless, with his nails clenched into his flesh, fighting with his madness that he might not betray it and be shamed for ever; and the Baroness watched him as a cat watches her prey.

Now this day was, as I have told you, a day of

strange occurrences. The palace was full of bustle and hurry-scurry, in striking contrast to its usual staid routine; and just then a thing unprecedented came to pass—a message from the Prince himself desiring the instant attendance of the Baroness Gräfelheuer. Never was woman so loth to obey, so foiled in her plans, so perturbed, so irritated, so helpless, as the worthy duenna. To have to leave the Princess alone with Master Huldebrand at such a time! To lose thus all the savour of the day's proceeding!

But even for the sake of Court etiquette, a royal summons is not to be lightly thwarted; a gracious Prince who does not like being kept waiting, must be instantly obeyed—the Gräfelheuer was fain to waddle forth after the lackey, and leave the professor and the Princess alone together.

As soon as she was gone, the master turned to the motionless figure by his side, and said but one word:

“Princess.”

She slowly raised her face to look at him; she had grown pale to the lips.

“Master,” she cried, “ah, master!”

And then, with a movement, which was all maidenly in its modest reserve, moved a little away from him, that he might not see the crimson glow of passion that fired cheek and eye.

But Master Huldebrand, as motionless he gazed on the pure averted head, saw the love-tide colour the white neck; and he stood with his hands hanging down at his side, aching all over with a searing, burning pain, battling with the yearning which boiled in his young blood, and which every instinct of honour and generosity bade him suppress.

Then he sat down to the piano and told his secret to the music.

He opened the floodgates of his heart in melody ; never but once again in all his life did the master play like that. It was as if nothing human held the keys ; it would have been as an angel's music but for its wail of despair ; it might have been the chant of a lost soul who sees amidst unutterable torments the fair, cool gardens of Elysium. What the master played then was never written, but as it burst from the seething anguish of his beautiful artist's spirit, so it escaped from his fingers, too exquisite, too passionate, too wild to be imprisoned in bars and measures. What he dared not say, what he must never reveal, he poured forth now in language no mortal could forbid, no stern conventionalist take exception to. Praise be to the God who made Art free and independent of men's narrowness !

Now the servants passing heard the storm of sound driven as it were from the music-room in great throbbing gusts, and paused to listen astounded. Beneath the open window a little knot of courtiers gathered one by one, nodding to each other :—

“ Ei, the master is great to-day.”

The Prince heard the wordless song in his cabinet, and paused in his grave conference with the Gräfelheuer to beat time to his favourite's playing ; and the Archduke who was sitting at draughts with the Prime Minister nodded his powdered head in a condescending kind of way, and said it was a pretty tune.

The Princess sat and listened as one spellbound hand and foot. And of a sudden the master stopped

with a broken crashing chord, like a lyre of which one had snapped the strings all across, and the music was mute. He rose, then, all white and quivering and spent, and the Princess rose likewise, and they faced each other. She, too, was white. She pressed her hands to her heart as if in pain.

"You have hurt me *here*," she said, and sighed. "Oh, master, you have hurt me."

But he groped blindly for his hat and fled away: and the tears poured down his cheeks as he went.

* * * * *

It was a fine thing for Sachs-Langweiligen, was the Princess' betrothal. *Heida!* what rejoicings there were. One night illuminations; little pink and green lamps hanging from all the trees, and festooning all the houses, and besides this a candle in every window; then, a band of trumpeters and a torchlight procession. Oh! that was grand. Another night there was a Court ball, to which all the nobility and the chief burghers were invited; and the next evening a ball at the Mayor's, where all the tradespeople and those of the middle class were right splendidly entertained, and capered to their hearts' content, and at which, moreover, the Court deigned to appear. The feature of the feast was a minuet danced by the royal betrothed, and a stately pair they made, I warrant you.

The Archduke was in the very prime of manhood, a fine, portly, handsome Prince, with a beautiful powdered wig and a pink and white complexion that all our maids and matrons went mad about. He had a way of bowing, with his lips fashioned into a little

heart-shaped smile, that was above everything fascinating; and it became quite the thing among fashionable young men to screw up their mouths and cock their little fingers for many months after his visit. He wore very rich clothes, too, and his legs were superb; moreover, he had just that amplitude which shows off the pattern of a waistcoat, and which, to my mind, gives a man a human, comfortable kind of look, which your lamp-posts never have.

It seems he was a Prince of excellent good sense, and the way in which he set about looking for a wife amply demonstrated it.

“It is not so much a wife that I require,” he said to our Chancellor with much astuteness and practicality, “as an Archduchess—I have not so much my own interests as those of my nation to consider.”

Therefore in the Princess selected to fill this happy post he required one indispensable quality above all others—dowry, good temper, pleasing manners, beauty, all these things were to be desired, of course, but before everything he must have an absolute guarantee of healthiness. The future Archduchess must be a healthy young woman, likely to bear him in time at least three healthy sons. Before engaging himself, he must be morally convinced that the person in question would be likely to suit on this point. Three sons and no less would content him, for—and here his forethought and wisdom will strike you at once—he most justly remarked that it is indispensable for the happiness of a people to have all doubts about the succession set at rest as

speedily as possible. With three sons he considered the nation need have no fear as to their interests being happily secured in the right line.

Now, our Princess had never had a day's sickness in her life; except, indeed, the measles at three years, and that only lightly; so there could be no doubt about her on that score. She had three brothers, too, fine, strong lads, and that was a good omen. Such things, they say, go in families. Our august Ludwig Wilhelm was the picture of health and vigour, and knew no ache, despite his sixty years, save now and again one in his big toe; and his blessed spouse, Amelia of sainted memory, would be now alive had it not been that in the upsetting of her carriage, ten summers ago, she was killed on the spot.

"Accidents will happen," said the Archduke, after reflecting profoundly on the fate of her who might have been his mother-in-law and its bearing on the case in point.

"Some, indeed," he added, with that remarkable good sense which was one of his characteristics, "one cannot provide against."

And then he looked out of the window at Seraphina's peachlike cheeks—she was in the garden with her ladies, where the cunning old Prince had sent her in full view of the Archduke's apartments—and after due deliberation with his private secretary and Court Physician he finally came to the conclusion that he could not do better than offer his august hand and heart for her acceptance.

The marriage was fixed to take place—in his own Grand Duchy—in a month's time. The Duke would hear of no postponement, for, he said, it was all-

important there should be an heir to his throne. with as little delay as possible.

Now, as I said, there were rejoicings of all sorts to celebrate the great event, but the only entertainment that was wanting happened to be just the one we Sachs-Landweiligers flattered ourselves we could best provide. And that was a grand concert. The reason of this grievous omission was that Master Huldebrand was ill. Ill in bed, poor man, of a sort of low fever which, though not in itself dangerous, threatened to become so in consequence of the patient's persistent depression and languor. The Prince was greatly put out at this untoward sickness. He was so proud of his Court Musician, so anxious to show him off to his grand future son-in-law, that, to make up for the disappointment, he formed a plan in his head to bring the artist with him to the Princess' wedding; and actually made arrangements with the Archduke to give, for that purpose, a great concert at Hassau Stadt the evening before the ceremony. Seraphina's subjects should learn, thought he, what sort of art we have in Sachs-Langweiligen, and let them match it if they can; for he knew there was none like it in the world.

As soon as the Archduke had taken his leave, full of this plan our gracious benignant Prince did a thing the like of which was never known in the *Residenz* before. Having ascertained there was nothing infectious in the complaint, being provided, moreover, with the Hof doctor's own stick, and holding the great gold knob with its pungent essences right under his royal nose, accompanied only by his chamberlain, Ludwig Wilhelm actually

paid a visit in person to the sick artist. Sitting down beside the bed, and speaking a little indistinctly, it is true, on account of the gold ball before his mouth, but quite intelligibly for all that, he told the Capellmeister to hurry and get well, that he might play at the Princess' wedding; it would give great pleasure to his daughter, said our ever-to-be-revered Sovereign, in the graciousness of his heart, to hear her old master on such an occasion.

The poor musician, lying gaunt and haggard on his narrow couch, and seeming, as I have heard, rather distressed than overjoyed at the immense honour vouchsafed to him, here grew so white that his Serene Highness got up to leave in some alarm.

But even as he reached the door, a feeble voice from the bed arrested him.

“Your Highness' commands shall be obeyed.”

“Na, na, 'tis good, 'tis good,” said our Prince; “you have a whole month before you, you know.”

And nodding his benevolent and venerable head at the sufferer, he withdrew with his attendant.

The next thing that happened was that Master Huldebrand began to recover from that day forth, which many held to be owing to the visit of the Sovereign, who had wrought a miracle on him by his very presence.

But the doctor—who was ever sceptical—said it was nought but sheer strength of will that raised the master from his illness, where before he had made no effort.

And as luck would have it, Master Huldebrand, though looking but a ghost of his former self, was up and about, and ready to go with the rest of us, when

the time had come for the departure of the Court. And that was in the third week in April, when the whole land was green.

* * * * *

Have you ever been in the North? Ah! what a country that is, to be sure! What steeples there are there, what shops, what towns! Yes, and for all that, I tell you, I would rather our valleys of the Langweil, our bright cheerful *Residenz*, our easy, sociable, out-of-door lives. Up there all is cold and gloomy and stiff, and the men have no thought but for business and money-making; and as for the women, *behüte!* I never saw such a lack of grace and beauty in my life. No wonder the Archduke came to us for a wife; our Princess looked a very angel of light among them. At the palace, moreover, all was conducted in the French fashion, which the Archduke said was the only endurable one; and I heard that to win his favour out and out, one had only to tell him his Court was another Versailles. To us honest southerners, it was a little bewildering at first, and even our great Ludwig Wilhelm himself would look askance at all the sliding, bowing, and curtsying that went on around him; and when they spoke to him in their jargon, in which, I assure you, there were more French words than anything else, as if their own good native tongue were not grand enough for them, I knew—God forgive me in saying such a thing of my venerable Sovereign!—that he did not understand one whit of all they were saying.

Though I did not take to it, there was no denying that Hassau Stadt was a fine town, and the palace was

magnificent. Part of it they said was built by Otho I., and its walls looked weather-beaten and ancient enough to have been built by Adam himself. Besides, it was so large that it would have swallowed up our *Residenz*, Theatre and all, and was surrounded by such acres of garden that it made me quite giddy. But it was gloomy, and my heart ached to think of our sweet royal flower being shut up in those bare gaunt walls for the rest of her life; though, to be sure, the Archduke was a fine man, and of a dignity most admirable to see. To watch him point his toes and arch his instep, swell his splendid chest and crook his little finger, I vow would fill any wife's heart with joy and pride at being espoused to so truly elegant a Prince.

Now, what do you think the Hof Doctor said to me, as I was dilating to him on that very subject?

"Ya, ya," said he holding a pinch of snuff to his long thin nose and looking at me with his head on one side after a way he had. "The Archduke is dignified beyond words. Have you ever seen a goose walk across the road?"

Of course this was extremely wrong of the doctor, and I could not see how an animal that is all body and no legs, like a goose, could be compared to any one who had such calves under his silk stockings as the exalted person in question; but the doctor was an admirer of Voltaire, a sceptic, and altogether a man of dangerous tendencies, and I have only told you this that you may see how differently two people can view the same question.

Well, on the Wednesday evening we arrived at Hassau Stadt, and on the Friday the wedding was to

take place. Our Prince, our lovely Princess, and their suite, were lodged with great pomp at the *Sommerschloss*, which was no separate residence, but a part of the royal palace itself, of very great antiquity, and united to the main and more modern building by a huge columned gallery.

But, though there was room here to put up a whole regiment, our master refused the rooms assigned to him, and chose to stop instead at a wretched little inn in a back street, preferring, he said, to be independent.

No one ventured to remonstrate with him on the folly and strangeness of this proceeding, for, since his illness, he had become so moody and odd in his manner that people had grown a little afraid of him.

And he kept himself away from us, so that from the night of our arrival till the evening of the concert, which was fixed for the next day, the eve of the wedding, we saw no more of him.

The concert-room in the palace was a very fine place, all florid gilding and painting, and on the night in question it was crammed to overflowing; all the Court was present, and those of the townsfolk important enough to have received invitations, together with the nobles of the land who had travelled from far and wide to see their Prince married, every one in his very best clothes, and as ugly a lot as you could see.

In the front row of all, on three gold and velvet arm-chairs, sat, first, our benign Prince, then Adolphus Frederick, resplendent in all his orders, and his wig in such beautiful big curls that it was fine to see; and on his left Seraphina Sophia, in a robe of pale green satin sewn with pearls, and her hair powdered high above

her head, and two such red cheeks that the Archduke could not take his eyes off them, so highly did he approve of their healthy appearance. But for all that, they came from the rouge-pot, as any one who knew our Princess in her simple home-life could have told him at a glance.

Punctually as the clock struck eight, the Royal party made its appearance, and at the selfsame moment Master Huldebrand stepped on to the platform. He looked paler than ever in his sombre purple velvet suit, and his eyes burned like live embers under his beetling brows. He came forward and made his bow, looked straight at the Princess, who cast down her eyes, and then seating himself at the clavier began to play.

On the programme it was said that he would begin by a sonata of Glück's, but even as he struck the first few notes I knew that no composer living or dead had written them, but that they came straight from our master's broken heart. As he once played to his Princess the day he heard the news of her betrothal, so he now played to her again for the last time. And we hung on his fingers, breathless, for he ravished us into a very ecstasy of melody such as was never heard before, save once, or will be again in this world.

How long it lasted I never knew, whether one hour or more, or whether it was less. It seemed like a minute, and yet as if one had been listening to it for centuries, and that it must go on eternally, so beautiful was it. It was sad, sad as life and sad as death, with such an unutterable wail of misery and yearning that I thought my heartstrings were cracking with the pity of it; it was sweet as the song of the nightingale in the moonlight, and the scent of the

honeysuckle in the heat of the day; it was stormy, it rose and fell in ever-recurring waves of sound as the ocean beats against the rocks in a tempest.

And there was no end to the changes in it. Now a song of love so seductive and tender as to stir even my withered old heart, now a lament so piteous and keen that the tears ran down my cheeks before I knew my folly. Once the master's fingers, speeding like a hurricane over the keys, drew from them a sort of savage dance of inexpressible weirdness, broken by a battery of short strange chords like bursts of demoniac laughter.

Surely never was instrument in the hands of such a fiend of inspiration before. In truth our master was like one possessed; as he played he swayed from side to side, his long, lank hair, half unpowdered, escaped from its ribbon, and hung grey around his countenance. Every second he grew whiter and whiter, more wan, more wild, more haggard, and now and then one would almost have thought that he was battling in desperate frenzy with some ghastly, invisible spirit that drove him on despite himself.

But all at once a happier mood seemed to come over him, a series of tender modulations replaced the madness of his improvisation, and he gradually broke into a glorious strain, full of such solemn triumph and extraordinary gladness that all knew it could be nothing but a wedding march. And the Prince and the Archduke and all the audience, who had been not a little disturbed and astounded by the foregoing, now began to nod their heads and smile to each other, relieved to be free from the uncomfortable tension

which had held them; this they could understand; this was something like.

“Ya, ya, so it goes!”

But as the wedding march went on, gathering, as it were, more joy and more grandeur bar by bar, there crept, in some amazing and bewildering way, into its harmonies, one solemn note of woe, ever the same and ever recurring like the toll of a funeral bell. And I cannot tell you the weird and depressing effect of that note in the midst of the gladness, nor the gloom it seemed to cast over us all. And the gay strains grew faint and perplexed, with an increasing plaintiveness about them, hurried, uncertain, groping—and the mournful note tolled on, louder and louder, till it drowned all else with its frightful persistent, melancholy warning, and I felt a shiver run down my spine, and only that I was sitting amongst those dolts of Hassauers, should have stretched out my hand for a grasp of something warm and human.

Now, as I looked around, I saw nothing but white faces, eyes goggling and mouths gaping, so that it was clear to me I was not singular in my impressions. Only the Archduke went on beating time and nodding his head as he had done at the beginning of the march, and I do not think he noticed how his wedding music had grown into a funeral dirge.

Well, suddenly the Princess stood up from her seat, straight and rigid, pressed her hands to her left side, and calling out with a wild cry of pain:

“My heart, my heart!” fell fainting into her father’s arms.

Oh, there was a hurry-scurry! Everybody standing up and pressing forward, advising, condoling,

discussing, one louder than the other. A great breach of Court etiquette, to be sure, but then they were all delighted with the sound of their own voices again after the spell our master's wild genius had laid on them. (And yet I heard those Hassauers declare that there was nothing admirable about our artist at all, and his playing but a scrimmage over the notes. *Na*, so they are made in the north.)

Our sweet Princess was carried to her room, and the doctors were in instant attendance. The Archduke was put out—extremely so; he feared he might have been taken in after all, and that her health was not what an Archduchess's should be. But the doctors were able to reassure him completely. It was nothing—a mere passing weakness; the emotion, the music, the natural feelings of a maiden on such an occasion, all this explained the accident most satisfactorily. Why, a bride-elect who did not faint before the wedding would be something quite incorrect, after all.

And the master? The master had slipped away in all the bustle, and was back in his little room alone. He was only half-conscious of what he was doing, and some think he was then already in a fever, and that what he had played was a very delirium of music. And this, they say, further explains the surpassingly curious events that followed, and which, according to them, never happened at all, and were merely the phantasies of his disordered brain.

But it is a free world, and one need agree with no one; that is the comfort of it; so, as for me, I keep my opinion. But this, whether dream or reality, was what happened to Master Huldebrand that night.

It was towards midnight; all the town was quiet, and he was sitting still at his window in the little inn room thinking; whether awake or asleep none can say for certain. A tallow candle with a great long wick was burning on a table behind him, so that I suppose he could have been seen from the street. The wind was wild and cold, and the rain was falling.

Now he heard some one call him from beneath his window. It was a woman's voice, pitched in a low and cautious key, and yet with such urgency in its tones that it struck on the master's ear as loud as a brazen trumpet.

"Master Huldebrand, Master Huldebrand!"

The master arose in haste, and opening the case-ment, put forth his head into the driving rain.

A slim figure, whose face looked up at him white and anxious from the dark wrappings about her head, and which he vaguely saw was that of a young woman, stood just before the house.

"For God's sake," she cried, in the same subdued yet passionate manner, "come with me; come at once; the Princess has sent for you."

Now how the master got down the stairs and out of the door, who knows? but all I can tell you is, that at the sound of his mistress' name he felt a sudden madness. And the next minute found him in the wet, cold street, hurrying over the slimy stones, slipping, stumbling, but ever rushing onward by the side of the veiled figure, who skimmed along like the wind, pulling impatiently at his sleeve, as if she would have him speed yet faster.

Presently he knew that they turned through a narrow gate into a gravelled walk, where dripping

tendrils of creeping plants splashed across his face as he passed; that from this they came to a place where his guide stopped him and bade him, in a fierce whisper, tread cautiously or they were lost, and then they went down steps into the ground.

Down they went, some dozen steps or so, into a level flagged passage, where they groped their way onwards by the damp clammy walls; and, again, up steps of stairs so narrow, so abrupt, so winding, that as the master mounted, he grew quite giddy and exhausted, and thought they would never stop.

All at once a tiny ray of light filtered through the gloom, and then the mysterious messenger stopped him.

“Go in, in God’s name,” she said, and he thought she was weeping; “and may no evil come of this night’s work.”

The wall gave way under her touch, and the master found himself in a vast and spacious room, full of gentle light, fragrance, and warmth. And there—oh merciful Heaven!—on a couch, looking at him with sweet, eager, longing eyes, lay the Princess—*his* Princess—and she was all in white, like an angel, and her hands were pressed to her heart.

Slowly she stretched out her arms to him; then—surely it must have been a dream—the poor musician found himself upon his knees beside her, and she was clasping him by the neck.

“Oh, master,” she said, over and over again, “you have broken my heart; oh, master, tell me the music.”

And as he was silent in his bewilderment, and faint from awe and rapture, and did not answer, not knowing what she meant, she cried again, piteously, with a wail:

“ Tell me the music, tell me the music ! ”

There came a sort of blank over him from which he awoke to find himself in a strange and exquisite maze of happiness.

His arms were round his Princess, her head was on his shoulder, his eyes were drowned in hers in an unutterable ecstasy of passion. And he was telling her—though he knew not how, nor what words he spoke, no more than he had known the notes he had played—the master was telling her his love.

And presently he felt her sweet arms flag and flag as they clasped him ; and her fair head slip away from his shoulder ; the exquisite burden of her form grew heavier and heavier in his embrace ; and then something drew his head down, and his lips to meet hers, and all was oblivion save that he thought he was floating away on the music of heaven.

How long it lasted he could not count, when a sigh from the lips beneath his aroused him, and all at once those lips struck him with a sudden chill ; laying her gently down on the couch, he raised himself to look.

What was this ? What was this ? How cold, and still, and white ! Help, help ! the Princess ! Ah, my God ! What was this ?

Someone shrieked wildly behind him ; there came a veil before his eyes, a surging in his ears, and a swaying of the ground on which he stood. And loudly the tolling note that had haunted his wedding march began to boom and boom in his head. Then grasping hands dragged him into darkness, and there came a nightmare of steps, down and down in frightful dizzy descent, a hideous vista of interminable streets, and a fiend that drove him ever onwards ; and again

the tolling note in his head, so that he felt his brain bursting with the noise of it, and ran wildly to escape. After this unconsciousness.

* * * * *

When Master Huldebrand returned once more to sentient being, he was lying on his narrow bed in his little inn room, to which he had retired after the concert. And it was already late in the morning, for the sun was streaming in through the window in broad level rays, and the whole air was filled with the hum of the busy working town. The master lay for a moment or two wondering what was this weight of sorrow at his heart. Then he remembered it was the morning of the Princess' wedding-day; and as it was borne in upon him, the master turned over on his side, away from the light, that he might sleep to his misery.

But there was something irritating, something disturbing that would not let him rest. A monotonous mournful sound coming at slow intervals with maddening, hateful regularity.

The bell, the bell, that doleful, dreadful bell striking the air, vibrating, lingering, dying away, then again, and again, and again. Oh, God, he was going mad!

This knell that rang in his music last night, that haunted his dreams, that was inextricably mixed up with the wild, sweet, fearful memories now confusedly crowding back on him with each moment of fuller wakefulness; this knell that seemed to fall on a raw nerve, to send a quivering shoot of pain through his frame at every stroke, would it never be silent?

Yes, yes, he had gone mad, there could be no doubt of that.

He sat up in bed bathed in a cold sweat, and drove in frenzy his fingers into his ears. Behold! the bell ceased. With a new terror on him, he drew them out and listened, and there was the tolling again.

It was reality, then; his anguish redoubled, and though he knew not why, he shook with a great fear.

Now, as he sat and strained his ear to the hollow sound, there came a bustling and stirring in the next room, and looking he saw his door was ajar.

“God-a-mercy!” cried a woman’s voice from the room within, fat and jovial, “I have not yet recovered from the turn I got this morning. Figure to thyself, Trude—I go to the door for the milk, and there lies the Herr just as if he were dead, sopping and soaking with the rain, his face turned up to the sky as white as a cream cheese. You could have knocked me over with a breath.”

“*Herr je!*” came another voice in thinner accents, in a pause emphasised by a clatter of crockery, “and was he dead then?”

“God preserve!” cried the first with a shriek, “no, no, the poor gentleman was but in a faint! I think he had a little bit of fever in the night, and wandered out not knowing what he was doing. My man and I we carried him in and laid him in bed, and when last I looked in he was sleeping like a lamb. So long as he does not fall ill on my hands! . . . But as I was saying, it quite upset me, and now this bell with its tolling instead of the joybells for the wedding—just as I was about to start for the procession too. *Na*, knowest thou? I like it not. It is to me as if something had happened.”

Master Huldebrand still sat up listening, and that

so intently, it seemed as if all his strength and will had passed into the one faculty.

There came a tramp, tramp on the wooden stairs, and a call in a man's rough voice :

“Fraüchen, Fraüchen, hast heard the news? The Princess Seraphina was found dead in her bed this morning.”

The musician fell back on his pillow, and lay staring straight up at the ceiling.

“Well—well, 'tis all for the best perchance; you see, our Archduke had need of a healthy wife!”

“So somebody was saying.”

The master began to laugh and hug himself. The Princess was dead; she would never be the Archduke's bride—oh, that was grand!

But then came the bell again. How sad it was, how terrible in its unchangeable note! “Dead, dead—dead!” it seemed to say.

Dead!

He saw her cold and white and straight, her young face set in the eternal age of death, and bandaged with an awful white bandage; and she had one stiff hand on her broken heart. That's what she died of, of course—the master knew all about it; he had broken it, and he ought to know.

“Dead, dead, dead!” shrieked the bell, and

“Dead, dead, dead,” shrieked the master; and louder and louder came the tolling, till it filled the whole room with a mighty clamour, till the air became alive with the ringing, and the whole world was one great sound. Master Huldebrand rolled on the bed, and drew the pillows over his ears; in vain—he could not shut it out. He fell on his knees and

prayed ; he fought with it, and tried to beat it away, but all to no avail.

Then he found out something so terrible that the hair stood up on his head with the horror of it. And this was that he was the bell, he himself, unhappy man, and that he would have to toll on for ever. This was the Princess' wish because the music had killed her.

And howling he ran out into the street.

* * * * *

Ah, well ! our poor master—he was a great genius, but that was the end of it all. The Hof Doctor says he was always a little mad, and that even his music was against all reason ; but he never said that to me twice, for it was more than I would hear from any man.

Ah, he is a loss to us indeed ! No one ever played as he did.

They tell me he is a hopeless lunatic, and keeps on fancying himself a bell, which is an odd fancy ; if he had thought himself a clavier, you know, 'twould have seemed more natural. His sufferings have been terrible, but now he is quieter and more contented. Of late he has begun to believe that he is ringing for a wedding, which somehow appears to please him. I am told, however, he cannot live another year.

THE END.

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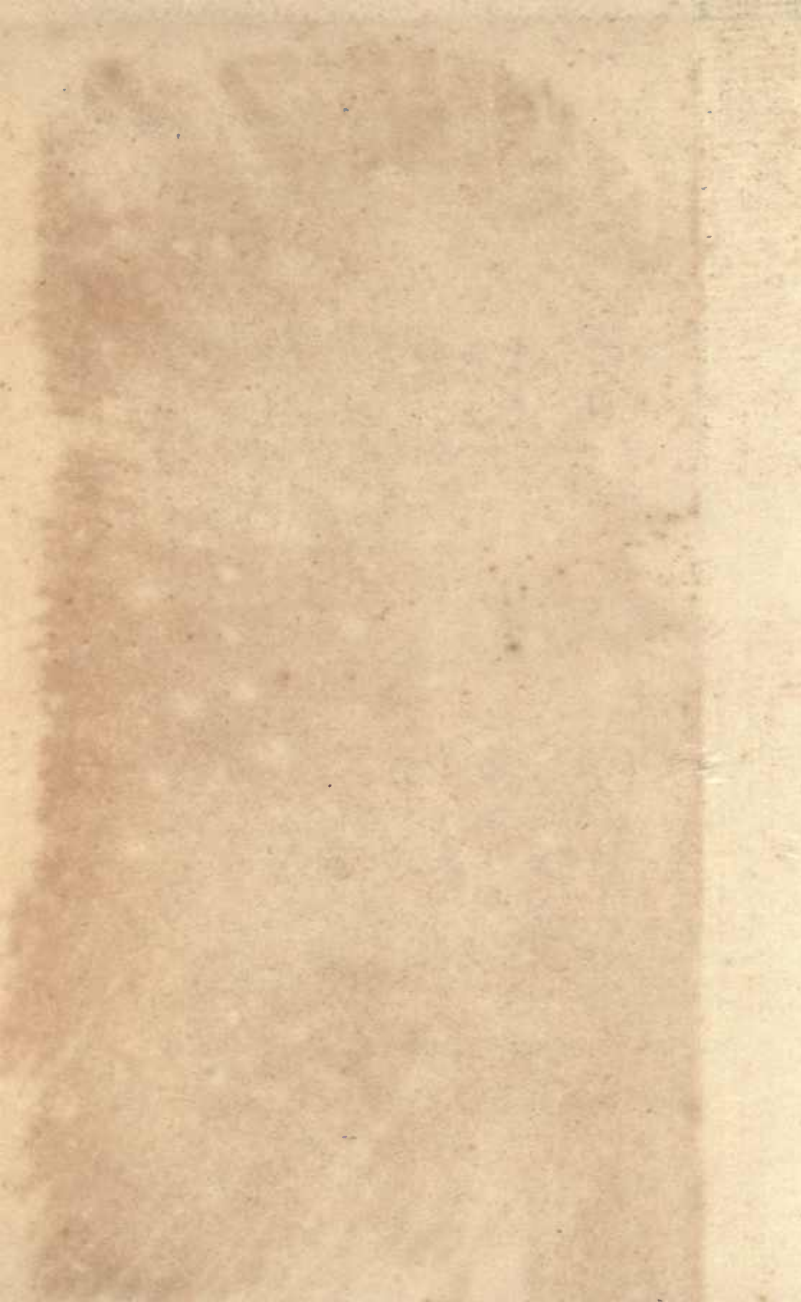
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